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IN THE LION'S MOUTH

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THE STORY OF TWO ENGLISH CHILDREN IN FRANCE

1789—1793

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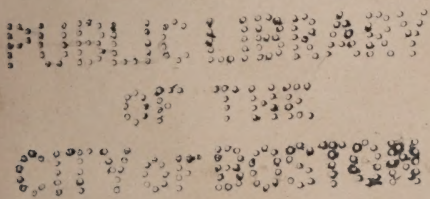
BY

ELEANOR C. PRICE

AUTHOR OF "A LOST BATTLE," "A LOYAL MIND," "THE LITTLE ONE," "MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS," ETC.



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IN THE LION'S MOUTH.

CHAPTER I.

KING'S CROSS.

"Life went a-maying
With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,
When I was young!"

On a March evening, rather more than a hundred years ago, the setting sun was shining red down the street of a little English town. The day had been cold and cloudy, a sort of day to make the most cheerful people shiver, and the prettiest country look desolate; but a beautiful sunset like this, a glory of red and gold flowing out under a dark grey curtain — which every moment rose a little higher, discovering lakes of clear pale blue — seemed in its peaceful splendour to banish all melancholy. It lighted up the low thatched cottages, making their latticed windows shine, and turned the swinging signs into glittering pictures, and dazzled the eyes of the people in the street, and gave a fine red glow to the old stone cross in the market-place, showing off its rich old carving in brilliant light and deep shadow, so that the hard usage of centuries was not so

sadly evident as usual. And beyond the cross, down the lane beyond the market-place, where more thatched cottages, with black beams and white plaster, crouched along each side of the way, the sunset light glorified some tall iron gates with brass points and flourishes, and shining full on the broad front, handsome old red brick, of the Manor-house beyond them, annoyed Mr. Julius Maynard so much that he angrily pushed back his chair, made one stride to the window, and pulled the curtain. He was talking very particular business with Lawyer Penn, in the white panelled parlour, and besides this, his ways and character suited a cloudy sky better than a sunny one. So the beautiful rosy radiance, falling like the shadow of an angel's wing on his snuffy brown coat and his piles of papers, and dazzling his eyes, which, like those of some animals, saw best in the dark, was not a welcome friend, but an enemy to be shut out as soon as possible.

Not many yards further down the lane was another iron gate, opening into the churchyard, where a leafless avenue of limes, arching over a worn stone pavement, led to the south porch of the large, neglected old church. Its walls and tower were chiefly built of flints, a not uncommon thing in that part of the country. In the churchyard the long grass and nettles grew wild, and on the north side the ground sloped to a small deep ravine through which a little river ran, and day and night murmured a pleasant low song. To the east of the church, not far from the Manor-house garden wall, the ground was kept more neatly. One or two

spaces enclosed with iron railings, and paved with slabs of stone, showed where the important families of the town were buried — those families whose names might also be found on tablets in the chancel, above the large pews where the living members appeared on Sunday. These melancholy spaces were out of reach of the evening sunlight which shone so kindly over the rest of the churchyard; but yet they were not quite neglected; for the glory came through the great west window, over pews and all, and glowed upon the stately figures of old stained glass with which the east window was filled, so that at certain times of day and night — for the moon in her seasons did the same — kings and saints, a noble procession, seemed to look down on that dark corner where the iron railings were.

Here, that evening, reading over and over again some freshly cut letters on one of the stone slabs within the railings, stood a girl and boy — Elizabeth and Constantine Maynard, more generally known as Betty and Con; now just fifteen and thirteen years old.

"Look at them, Betty!" said the boy, his large brown eyes wide open — he had turned from the railings, and was gazing up at the window. "Look! they seem to move: they are walking across the window." But Betty could not take her eyes from those letters on the stone, which told her how Constantine Maynard, her dear father, had died on a certain day in February in that year, just one year later than her mother, his wife. And in her ears were always the

last faint words she heard from him — "Betty — the boy — I leave my son in your care." The mother, too, had rested on Betty at the last, and had told her to take care of her father and brother. It was through no fault of Betty's — the dear mother knew, she thought — that the cold winter had taken and carried away a man much troubled and weary of life. He did not care to live, even for the children, and even though he left them with no relation but his brother Julius, a man with whom it was only his own gentleness that had kept him on friendly terms at all.

"Look at them, Betty! they'll be gone," cried the boy again, catching her hand. "Which was the king who made our cross, and changed the town's name? Is he there? Is he one of those?"

"Yes, Con; you know he is. King Henry the Sixth. There, in the corner, kneeling before the Bishop. If you minded your book, you would know all about him."

"The Red Rose: I know," said the boy. "How I should like to be a king! Or else I should like to die for a king, as all those people did for King Charles. Kings don't have their heads cut off now."

"No, except in savage countries," Betty answered quietly.

Her father's favourite study had been history, and the children had grown up with a deep interest in kings and queens; also, as their father was a good old-fashioned churchman and politician, they were young Tories to the backbone. But few moder

theories, even in this year 1789, had found their way up the broad quiet street of King's Cross. No one there would have understood or welcomed them, certainly not Betty Maynard. Grave, severe, religious and obedient, with a perfectly simple and straightforward mind, she could only imagine one set of right opinions. They were her father's, with a little additional strictness of her own. Tall, strong, not attractive or pretty, though her straight young face might soften and light up with time, Betty was a girl to be trusted by all, and to be loved by those she loved. She knew nothing of the world outside King's Cross, and less than nothing of the world beyond the sea. She was coming gradually to suspect that there was a great deal of wickedness about somewhere, and not being curious or adventurous by nature, she never wished to leave the country town where she was born. To please her father, she had read a great deal of poetry. Shakespeare and Spenser were especially familiar to her: but in her heart she cared more for plainer food, for what she called *true*. A more thoroughly English girl could not be found than Betty Maynard, as she stood there at the foot of her father's grave, and slowly, drawn by her brother's eagerness, lifted her eyes from the letters of his name to the painted sunlit glory of kings and saints above.

Constantine was not in the least like Betty; for a brother and sister, they were strangely different. People who called her boyish would have called him girlish; for he was small and delicate, not active in

games, and altogether young and helpless for his age. He had not been to school, for his father could not bear to part with him, and had taught the two together. They had done the same lessons, in which Betty, by hard work and perseverance, had left her brother far behind. Yet Constantine was by no means stupid; he was only idle and careless, and unwilling to work at anything that did not interest him. He was a boy with an imagination, fond of drawing, fond of music, and especially fond of dreaming, fancying adventures, and making stories in his own mind. Betty, though she often did not understand him, and was sometimes angry with his idleness, loved and admired him with all her heart. The fat old Rector of King's Cross, who lived in a large country house a mile away, used to lay his hand on Constantine's head sometimes and call him "our young poet." Constantine liked this. Betty knew that he had already written some verses, and they both thought that some day a printed book might appear, making Constantine Maynard as famous as Mr. Cowper or Mr. Pope.

But now the children's life seemed suddenly to have fallen into ruins. Lessons had stopped. Uncle Julius, the one person in authority, had not yet given any sign of what was to happen in the future. Betty was haunted by a fear that she and Con might be separated, sent to school, perhaps; and she had a chilly feeling in her heart that if Uncle Julius decided on this, there would be no help for it. Clever and sensible as she was, she knew very little about their affairs. The

Manor-house, and a good deal of land about it — most of King's Cross, in fact — had belonged to her father; she supposed therefore that it would belong some day to Constantine. But Uncle Julius had told them nothing. Immediately after their father's funeral, the kind old Rector had taken them away to his house for a week. In the meanwhile, no doubt, the will was read, the affairs were arranged, without any knowledge of theirs. Two children — it was natural that their guardian should settle everything for them as he thought best. Now a month had passed. Uncle Julius had twice gone to London by the coach, and come back again — only a journey of forty miles. Mr. Penn, the attorney, who had a way of slinking along the street as if he expected people to set their dogs upon him, had spent a great deal of time in the parlour at the Manor-house. The tenants of Squire Maynard's houses had come by twos and threes to see Mr. Julius, who now appeared to be their landlord, and had generally gone away with lengthened faces. There was a great deal of talking and whispering among the people in the town, even among the servants at the Manor-house; but Julius had a way of making himself feared, and not a word of gossip reached the ears of the children.

"I tell you, Mr. Attorney," said Julius Maynard, "it will be best for you and me clearly to understand each other."

"Softly, my dear sir!" murmured his companion, with a frightened look. "There might be eavesdroppers."

After drawing the curtain, and shutting out that evening glory from the room, Julius had tramped across the room and planted himself on the hearth-rug, in front of the fire. He was a tall, large man, with a loud voice and a rough manner. He went in for the character of "an honest John Bull"; and his appearance bore this out well, except the look in his eyes, which was cunning and crafty.

"Eavesdroppers! They know better," he said; but he went to the door, opened it, and shut it again with a bang. "All safe. Men and maids at their work, youngsters in the churchyard. Listen to me, Mr. Attorney."

Little Penn made him a kind of bow, moving uneasily in his chair, and shuffling the papers on the table.

"'Tis plain enough to us both," said Mr. Julius, "that my late brother has left his affairs in a bad state; that his property has been losing in value, his houses falling to pieces, his tenants paying irregularly — all for want of prudent management -- Hey, what's that, Mr. Attorney?" The lawyer had muttered something between his teeth, which now, turning red, he repeated aloud: "I said — for want of ready money."

"I was coming to that, sir," said Mr. Julius, with a loud, short laugh. "It has pleased you to discover that within the last few years my poor brother Constantine has lent me various sums amounting to fifteen thousand pounds — odd. You think that now is the time for this money to be repaid. There, sir, I am of a different opinion. No one knows of the debt but yourself. And

I happen to have proof in my hands of a certain embezzlement of rent — a matter of ten years since, 'tis true, but if I happen to open my mouth on the subject, Mr. Joseph Penn will find himself between the four walls of a prison, besides being struck off the roll of His Majesty's Attorneys. So — things being thus — it seems to me that this is a fair bargain. I hold my tongue touching those hundreds. You hold yours touching those thousands. My poor brother died without a will, which surely shows that he was lacking in prudence, as I said just now when you interrupted me. Thus I step in as the natural guardian of these minors, his children. The estate will be in my hands, mark you, till they are of age, and I shall manage it as I think best, Mr. Attorney, for their advantage — and mine — and yours, if you are true to me."

"Mr. Maynard, sir," replied the lawyer, rising from his chair, and leaning with both hands on the table, "your noble brother forgave me that old crime against him, for the sake of my wife and children. I believe he thought he had destroyed all proof of it. But as he did not — I am in your hands, as you justly point out to me. I am at your service, barring this — I cannot assist in any plans for the children which will be very disadvantageous for them — which would have given their parents great displeasure."

Mr. Julius glared, and the little man trembled.

"Do you think, sir, that I am likely to plan anything to the disadvantage of my nephew and niece? If you are so suspicious, we had better part company on the spot."

"No — no, sir! But you said something of sending them to France, and by what I read in the news — you may not have observed it — that country is not precisely in a settled state."

"The newspapers are full of lies," replied Julius. "Besides, how could a small disturbance in the politics of Paris affect two children in a country town? They will see the world. They will be better educated, and more cheaply, than at any English schools. They will learn to talk the language, which is useful. They can stay five years. After that, I must find a husband for my niece, and send my nephew to the University."

The lawyer still looked unhappy, stooping over his papers and fumbling amongst them.

"I have heard Miss Betty say that she hated the French," he murmured, half aloud. "I doubt whether her good father — 'Tis an infidel country, besides, where not Papist."

"Miss Betty is an ignorant goose," said the uncle. "And as to religious objections, they come uncommon well from you, Mr. Penn."

While these two villains — one weak, the other strong — were talking and plotting thus, the red sunset light had died away, and a cold grey twilight had settled down on King's Cross. That glorious procession of saints and kings had ceased in the church window; mists rose from the long damp grass and hovered about the old walls and the graves. Slowly, hand in hand, Betty and Constantine walked from the churchyard into their own garden, lingering under the trees,

where Betty had done a good deal of hard digging lately.

"We shall have a fine garden here," she said, "if I have time to conquer the weeds."

Constantine thought there would be plenty of time. Betty had not shared with him her fears about school; she saw no use in making the little fellow unhappy.

"I shall come and sit here in the summer," he said, "and tell you stories while you are working."

Just then came the rough voice of Uncle Julius, calling across the lawn. "Here, youngsters! Betty! Con! Come along into the white parlour. I've a piece of news to tell you."

CHAPTER II.

THE VIOLIN-PLAYER.

"Heureux villageois, dansons:
Sautez, fillettes
Et garçons!
Unissez vos joyeux sons,
Musettes
Et chansons!"

THE population of Bec-sur-mer was dancing. Long shadows of tall gabled houses fell across the grass-grown square and the plane-trees. On the other side, a clear and golden glow of sunset lighted up the high fronts of white plaster and dark carved wood, tottering and uneven from age, and made a hundred yellow lamps glow in the small and dim old windows. Under this illumination, in the mingled shadow and sunlight, which gave a curiously dazzling radiance to the whole scene, young and old were dancing. The few exceptions, idle or lame or sulky, stood looking on at the openings of the narrow dark streets which led into the square, or sat smiling with the mistress of the White Horse Inn, who was too fat to dance, under the arch of her gateway. The women who danced were all well dressed; some in a kind of fish-wife costume with

short blue petticoats, some with gold chains, smart silk aprons, the tall white caps of their district. The men were in good clothes of dark cloth. All the faces were naturally grave; but smiles of enjoyment broke over some as the dance, ruled as it was by strict etiquette, became faster, wilder, more and more carried away by the wild excitement of music and movement. A few of the older people broke into little hopeless laughs, and fell away out of the ranks, as the music hurried them beyond their powers. They staggered back against the wall of the White Horse, and there, as soon as breath came back, burst forth into remonstrances to Madame Pommery. It was too quick; it was unheard of; it was ridiculous. Only children could keep up such a mad pace. Surely such madness was a sign of the times. When they were young — not so very long ago either — the great-great-grandfathers could dance with the children quite peacefully. A proper time was kept by the musicians. As for this little monsieur, somebody ought to take the fiddle out of his hands. He had it too much his own way. If it amused him to play like a race-horse, it did not amuse the good folks of Bec to dance to his playing. *Voilà!* Why should a little scamp of a fellow like that have it all his own way? Would madame kindly explain?

Most of this was poured out by the apothecary, who was himself growing fat, though at present a mere lath compared to madame. Her large cheeks were wrinkled with a smile.

"It is a pity," she said, "that monsieur's condescension should be thrown away. All these things are a matter of habit. These good people are more active than monsieur; the music is not too fast for them. Look: they laugh and enjoy themselves. Such playing as Monsieur Camille's is not often to be heard in the square of Bec. He is very obliging in his way. If he does not dance with the people like monsieur, he plays for them: we all have our turn. Monsieur will take a chair beside me and repose himself."

The touch of malice in madame's words and manner was thinly enough veiled to be visible to the bystanders. They smiled; the apothecary's efforts after popularity were well known in Bec. The broadest and most contented smile was on the face of another fat woman somewhat younger and handsomer than madame, but very like her, with a black travelling hood tied over her head. She was sitting on the landlady's right, and when the name of Monsieur Camille was mentioned, her eyes returned to the object on which they had been fixed till the apothecary's words diverted them, with a frown of indignant wonder, to his red and disagreeable face. This object, which was indeed the central object of the square and the moving spirit of the whole, was the young fellow who sat on a three-legged stool a few yards away, playing the violin. He was about eighteen, long and lanky, dressed in green cloth, with a green beaver hat very much on one side, and a quantity of curly reddish hair flowing under it. His skin and eyes were very dark,

his features plain and rather odd. His lips were tight set, his eyes fixed upon the dancers, and yet as if he did not see them. He was playing to himself, not to them, and it was the playing of a genius. The wild, rapid music which stirred people's blood so strangely, and made them dance as they had never danced before, was not in itself glad or merry. It was a kind of race for life; its desperate hurry was almost painful; it seemed to belong to some other land than the easy, light-hearted land of France. Perhaps the dancers would have felt this soon in spite of themselves; in fact, as they danced on, as the shadows grew longer, darkening half the front of houses that faced west, even the happiest faces among them grew a little grave. Then at the height of its frantic pace the music stopped suddenly, so suddenly that one or two of the most active dancers, who had been most entirely carried away, lost their footing and almost fell. There was a burst of gay laughter; nobody was angry; the crowd stood still, using all its eyes — for something new had just appeared on the scene.

Monsieur Camille had been the first to see the three figures which came walking into the square from the short street which led to the ramparts and the sea gate. A ray of the setting sun, finding its way through some opening, fell upon them and lighted them up as they stood — a rough, broad-shouldered, red-faced English skipper, and a boy and girl holding each other by the hand — the boy pale and full of excitement, the girl's face set in a kind of steady, fierce, watchful endurance;

both dressed in black. There was something terrible to Betty Maynard in that moment, when she and Constantine first faced a French crowd. The sudden silence, the stopping of the music and the ceasing of the dance, the feeling that she and her brother were the object of all those strange, foreign, unfriendly eyes — it was a moment that Betty never could forget. Only a moment: Camille had leaped from his stool, laid his violin with a hurried word in the lap of the fat woman who sat by Madame Pommery, and was striding with eager, awakened eyes across the square.

"Good-day, sir; good-day, Captain," he said, with a low bow. "Good-day, mademoiselle; good-day, monsieur;" two more low bows for Betty and Constantine.

It must be confessed that their manners forsook them, and they stared at the odd figure helplessly. Only their friend the skipper was equal to the occasion.

"That's the young gentleman, miss," he said to Betty. "That's Mr. Durand's son, as he's sent to meet you. — Ay, sir," he went on in French to Camille, "I've brought the young lady and gentleman safe across the Channel, as my charge was. Born sailors both of them. I could judge of that, though the sea was like a mill-pond. They were as happy on board the *Rose* as in their own house at home — or would have been, if they'd known or liked where they was going to. I had my orders from Mr. Maynard to leave them with Mother Pommery, till called for by your father; that is, in case he hadn't sent for them."

The Captain went on talking in a loud voice, glancing

sideways at Betty and Constantine to see how much they understood, while Camille, with bows and signs, led the way across the square. The Captain had a soft heart under his rough pilot-coat. He had not liked his charge, in spite of the high payment he received for his two young passengers. He had a daughter of his own not far from Betty's age, and nothing would have bribed him to send her across the Channel in a cargo-boat, with no woman on board, and no companion but a little brother. He had done business for Mr. Maynard before, but none quite so queer as this. He did not see why these two young English people could not be educated in their own country, or what advantage they could possibly gain by being placed under the care of Monsieur Durand. If he had not believed M. Durand to be a solid and a rising man, connected with worthy people, and straightforward in business affairs, he would not have been inclined to carry out Mr. Maynard's wishes. At least, so he assured himself; but after all, the Captain was a weak human being with a wife and family, who did not always find it easy to make both ends meet. And no one knew better than Julius Maynard how to choose his agents. He meant to get rid of his nephew and niece, at least for a time, but he wanted to save his own credit by doing it decently, as well as effectually, and as long as his object could be made to look outwardly respectable, he preferred employing respectable people to gain it for him. Certainly, a considerate uncle would hardly have packed off two helpless and ignorant children on board the *Rose;* but

he knew Captain Johns could be trusted to take care of them in a rough sort of way, and no better boat than the *Rose* sailed to a small trading and fishing port like Bec-sur-mer. Besides, Captain Johns, like himself, was well acquainted in the way of business with M. Durand, the great wine-grower, exporter, general merchant, and Jack-of-all-trades of Mercy-le-Roy, who among his many talents was a student of the classics, and professed a great love of teaching and training the young. The arrangement was wheel within wheel. Julius Maynard had in a secret way consented to dirty his fingers with trade, sharing in some of Durand's speculations. A Coastguard appointment, which he had for some time held on the south coast, gave him certain facilities very cautiously and cleverly made use of. He took care not to risk his own neck; at the same time, he was sometimes called in a wrong direction at a convenient moment, when a French boat might slip into some hidden little cove. On the whole, though he had now given up this appointment, finding the work too hard and anxious for his constitution, there still existed a good deal of mutual obligation between him and M. Durand.

Neither Betty nor Constantine Maynard was troubled with cowardice, and whatever was the feeling that occupied their hearts and minds, when they first trod French soil, it was not fear. Betty knew anxiety, which Constantine did not. He felt safe as long as she was near him, and something adventurous and romantic in his nature helped him to enjoy new

scenes so much, that his regret at leaving King's Cross had been far less keen than hers. He had enjoyed the passage, making friends with the sailors, resolving that he would be a sailor himself some day. He was laughing and chattering, while Betty sat silent on the deck, her young brow frowning, her eyes fixed on the last shadow of England till she could see it no more. Her uncle had told her that he was sending them on a visit to good friends of his in France, who would teach them French and carry on their education. Betty could only submit; but she told herself over and over again that she hated the French, that she would never make friends with a single French person. She would learn the language if she must; she knew a little of it already; besides, it would be good for Constantine — a man, going about the world, ought to be able to speak French. But Betty vowed her whole heart to England, to the country where her father and mother lay. They had never left it: why should she and Con leave it? She did not know. Uncle Julius meant to be kind, she supposed; and Betty's loyal soul was unwilling to think any ill of her father's brother. But she had heard the talk of the servants and the villagers, and she could not help fearing that Uncle Julius was not a very good man. However, it was plain that till they were of age, she and Con must do as he told them. Her business in life was to take care of the boy; she could do that in France, as well as in England — and Betty grasped his hand a little tighter as they walked across the square.

Fat Madame Pommery rose slowly from her seat, and curtseyed with great politeness to the young English lady. Her companion in the black hood advanced a step or two, beaming with smiles. Captain Johns, meanwhile, muttered English explanations in Betty's ear.

"Miss Betty, the fat dame is Madame Pommery, the landlady of the White Horse Inn. And the dame as is not so fat is her sister — they call her Adrienne. I've seen her afore. She's a woman of confidence in Mr. Durand's family — housekeeper, or some such person. I rather think she was Master Camille's nurse."

Camille threw back his ruddy curls and laughed; he seemed to understand what the Captain was saying. He then said something to Adrienne, who came up to Betty, took her hand and kissed it, before she knew what was happening. The colour flamed in Betty's cheeks: this was being treated like a queen. Adrienne wished to kiss Constantine's hand too, but he put one behind him and took off his cap with the other. There was a laugh and a quick, rising chatter among the people who stood by. Madame Pommery waved her hand to the groups in the square, and called to them to go home: there would be no more dancing to-night. Then she nodded good-night to the apothecary and one or two other favoured townspeople who had been sitting with her in her gate; and as the last rays of the May sun sank behind the tall houses, Betty and Constantine followed her across the shady courtyard into the large living-room of the inn.

Thus nothing could have been kinder than the reception of the two young English. Betty, however, though hardly realising her own feeling, had not liked or trusted the faces that crowded and stared in the square. They were mostly dark and thin; their glances were eager, fierce, like those of wild animals; but like wild animals — and this was beyond Betty's perception — their instincts were as often good as bad. They could be full of light-hearted enjoyment, made perfectly happy by little things, contented with a dance and a laugh; or they could be seized with ferocious fits of hatred — of the English, of their own upper classes, of any object set up before them by any agitator, imaginary brigands, imaginary conspirators. Mobs in all ages have been the same; savagery seizes men in flocks; people who can be kind and peaceable separately are capable of horrors and cruelties when driven all together.

But the dark faces of the first French crowd she had seen did not haunt Betty's dreams that night. She and Constantine spent it peacefully in two of the four beds in Madame Pommery's great guest-chamber. It was a room such as they had never seen before, with a floor of polished red tiles, walls hung with faded old tapestry which delighted Constantine, and windows opening on an outside gallery and staircase from the courtyard. Madame Pommery had entertained noble families at the White Horse in her time; and these families, when on a journey, were well accustomed to be packed to the number of seven or eight in a room.

Very fortunate if they could have that room to themselves, without being expected to share it with strange travellers.

It was long before Betty could persuade Con to kneel down and say his prayers with her as usual. And long after she had seen him safe into bed, and heard his even breathing — for the sea air sent him to sleep at once in spite of all the new excitement — Adrienne, looking in at a chink in the door, saw a little white figure kneeling beside Betty's bed. Betty had never been so lonely in her life, never had so much trouble in believing that she was not really alone, and that the angels who guarded her bed in England would guard it in France too. She had some notion of staying awake all night to watch over Constantine; but her own sleepiness was soon too much for her; she scrambled into bed with prayers still on her lips, and fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

The early morning broke with brilliant sunshine streaming in, with a babble of voices, a splashing of water, a clatter of wooden shoes on the stones of the courtyard. There was a clanking of horses' feet too, a jingle of harness-bells, the groaning and creaking of the great machine called *diligence*, which was to carry the young strangers miles away from Bec that day. And in the midst of all these noises, with the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs added to them, a sweet morning tune on the violin was being played by Camille in the balcony just outside the bedroom window.

Betty opened her ears on all this, and her eyes on Adrienne's kind face, smiling through the curtains. Betty sat up, rubbed her eyes and smiled too. It did not seem possible to be very unhappy in France that May morning.

CHAPTER III.

ACROSS COUNTRY.

"And we, who now some little happiness
Could find in that fair place and pleasant air,
Sat 'neath strange trees, on new flowers growing there,
Of scent unlike to those we knew of old,
While unfamiliar tales the strange birds told."

The *diligence* rumbled through hollow country roads, between orchards deep in green grass, where the pink blossom had not long faded from the grey lichen-stained old trees. Great bunches of mistletoe hung among the boughs. The country was very lonely and silent, with few animals and fewer people to be seen. Here and there the low thatched roofs of a cottage and a few sheds nestled in some green hollow near a pond with a tangle of briars about it; or the arched gateway of a farm, built of old white-washed stones, opened near the road, and three or four dogs rushed out to bark savagely. Everywhere, over every corner of wall and every available tree, great bushes of ivy grew and hung heavily, and the lanes and the small fields were gay with flowers, wild rose and honeysuckle climbing and clustering and scenting the air. This air was clear and bright; the colours were more

vivid and transparent than in England. The young travellers, accustomed to observe, said to each other that it was all shining and still. And it was not so very unlike England either, when one had only the shady roads and the wild flowers. It was in the dark faces of the people that the great difference showed itself. The wild children who watched goats by the roadside, who peered behind a tree, more timid than their charges, and ran away in terror when the driver cracked his whip; or the old women with short petticoats and bare legs, with dried-up faces like brown leather, and bright eyes that stared in a fierce curiosity; or the dark gloomy-looking men, thin and bent with toil, who worked on the roads here and there in discontented groups, or tramped past driving carts drawn by oxen: all these gave Betty the same feeling of strangeness and distrust that had come to her in the market place of Bec-sur-mer. And yet a kindly word from the driver of the *diligence*, or a smiling nod from Adrienne, or a flourish of Camille's green hat; and white teeth shone in the brown faces, and the fierce old women called out blessings, and the men took their caps off and bowed as politely as if every one of them had been brought up at court. And then Camille would turn round to his young charges, whose faces he watched constantly with those clever, dreamy eyes of his, and whose every thought he seemed to read, and would say to them, "You do not find our people like the English, monsieur and mademoiselle. But let me assure you that they are very good; yes, our hearts are

very good in France. You will like us when you know us; indeed you will. And you could not have come to France at a better time. We are going to reform everything that is wrong, and to make the peasant as happy as his master. There have been injustices; there are tyrannical old customs; we shall do away with all. It is a glorious thing, do you know! Nobles, clergy, and third estate — that is men like my father — they are all met together at Paris to arrange things. And then — in a few months — you will see the Golden Age begin. What a happy time to live; and what a happy time for you to visit France, mademoiselle!"

At first Betty did not understand more than a word here and there of Camille's talk, but she saw Adrienne nodding and smiling, and she smiled shyly too. The Camille would snatch up his violin and play, while Constantine, who loved music, gazed at him in rapt admiration.

That *diligence* journey of three days and nights would have seemed much longer and duller without Camille, who was never still. When the horses were wearily dragging the lumbering machine up a hill full of ruts, he was on the road directly, holding out his hands to help the children, while Adrienne, who was too fat to enjoy walking, smiled contentedly from her corner, and the three or four other passengers, quiet and uninteresting people, waited calmly in their places till the coach should stick fast and they should be ordered out of it. Then Betty and Constantine strolled along with the lank, red-haired young Frenchman, and he

gathered wild flowers for them, telling them the name of each and a few botanical facts about it, mixing here and there with his remarks some English word he had picked up from his father's English correspondents. In this way the children were fast becoming intimate with him, and being both quick and intelligent, they were beginning to understand him and to venture on a few French words themselves.

As they advanced further inland he had stories to tell them which might have frightened a nervous child — of robbers who had their home in the forest that darkened yonder hills; of the were-wolf, more terrible still, sometimes a man, sometimes a beast, a terror to the peasants, who would not for any reward venture through the forest at night; of a wicked *seigneur* who had lived in that castle, the white tower of which gleamed through distant trees, who used to hunt his peasants with dogs when they offended him, and who was now, on the dark nights of winter, hunted through the woods himself by an invisible pack of hungry hounds. Camille's eyes, as he told these stories, sparkled with a smile; he was evidently far too much of a young philosopher to believe them; but there was a more real terror in this wild wooded country, which made Adrienne call to him anxiously as soon as the day began to close, if she thought her young people had lingered too far behind on the hill. There were wolves, real wolves, in the forest, and it was not only in winter that they ventured out of its deepest recesses. One of the peasants whom they met was sobbing bitterly over

the loss of a fine young colt that had been carried off by these wild beasts the night before, though he was tethered in a field close to his poor owner's cottage.

The country through which they were now travelling was much wilder than that nearer the sea. It was very hilly and sandy; the road sometimes was little better than a wild track through a waste of heather and pine-trees; and the great forests which clothed the slopes were chiefly a dark regiment of firs with an undergrowth of young oak. Then the character of the soil changed again; it became more chalky, and they passed between stretches of beech-wood, lovely in its young shining green. There was very little cultivation, and the few people looked even wilder than those nearer the sea. There were deep lanes over which high hedges waved, and here and in the woods a great golden broom grew luxuriantly, lying like plumes of yellow feathers carelessly thrown among the green; while still the wild rose and the honeysuckle climbed over every stump and hung in sweet untouched wreaths above the pathways.

It was not till later that Betty and Constantine realised that this was the country of the Plantagenets, the pleasant and picturesque province of Anjou from which Count Geoffrey came to marry the Princess Matilda of England, wearing a sprig of yellow broom in his cap, the *planta genista* of his country.

In spite of the strangeness and interest of their journey, the children were thoroughly tired out when at last the *diligence* rumbled along the white untidy

street of a straggling village, and stopped at the archway of a dilapidated old inn. It was late in the afternoon; the day had been hot and oppressive, and for several hours they had been travelling through a wild forest country, where the fear of wolves, or robbers, or both, made the driver whip up his horses, so that there had been little pleasant loitering with Camille along the flowery sides of the road. Constantine had gone to sleep in the afternoon heat, with his head on Betty's shoulder, but Betty herself was wide awake. She had slept little since the night after their landing at Bec-sur-mer. It was not only the strange scenes, the strange circumstances, which kept her awake; but in spite of the kindness of Camille and Adrienne, and indeed of all the French people to whom she had spoken, she could not drive from her that feeling of necessary watchfulness, of danger and suspicion, which had come upon her with the first landing. It was like a presentiment of something still hidden from sight, and even from imagination; something quite different from robbers or wild beasts, more real, more close in its horror than any forest superstition of were-wolf or ghostly huntsmen; something that now and then, for no reason, with no meaning, sent a little shiver through Betty's young frame, and unconsciously tightened the arm that lay round her brother's shoulder.

"How foolish I am! there is nothing to be frightened at," the girl said to herself indignantly. "These good people wish us well and treat us kindly. Besides, God is as near us in France as in England."

"This is Mercy-le-Comte," said Camille, as the *diligence* lurched heavily over the stones and pulled up, groaning and creaking, in the narrow street. "Here we are to stay the night, mademoiselle, with my old tutor, Monsieur Gérard, the *curé* of the place —an excellent man, let me assure you. This is the nearest point to my father's house at Mercy-le-Roy; we shall go on to-morrow morning, and be there to breakfast. Does this please you, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Betty. With a gentle shake she waked Constantine, who stared about him dreamily. Then she hastily helped Adrienne to collect her bundles; then the steps were let down, and out of the large and dark interior of the *diligence* she descended, politely handed by Camille, under the evil-smelling archway of the inn. Scarcely had her feet touched the ground when she heard a voice saying, "Here you are then, Camille, my son!" and she looked up into a face which, as some faces can, seemed at once to drive all her fears away. It was the old and plain face of a man dressed in black, with a large flapping hat. His smile was the kindest, the most trustworthy, that Betty had ever seen; and something familiar in his expression reminded her of their old friend, the Rector of King's Cross; but this man did not look as if he dined richly every day and drank his bottle of old port after dinner. This man's housekeeper could have told how often the Curé's dinner was carried secretly to the poorest hovel in Mercy-le-Comte. No slight is here intended to the Rector of King's Cross,

whose butler could not have allowed such things to happen; he also was most charitably inclined, and always ready to scatter guineas among his people. One man was rich, the other poor, and each did good in his own way.

Camille took one of his old tutor's hands and kissed it, while the other lay for a moment lightly on his red curls. The Curé then took his hat off and bowed low to the young English strangers. Constantine returned his bow, and Betty made him her best and most careful curtsey. Then they all walked away together in the warm evening shadows down the village street, Adrienne following, and stopping to exchange remarks with friends by the way. People were sitting on their doorsteps, and on the white cobbly stones outside. They were staring and chattering, but all this was good-humoured; these village people, though poor enough, had not the wild and hunted look of the peasants in the country.

At the far end of the village, a curious old Romanesque church was approached by an avenue of clipped and stunted limes; such as they were, they threw a pleasant shadow, and the fresh leaves rustled in the evening air. Beyond them, a little gate from the road led into a long garden full of flowers and fruit-bushes, with a few cherry-trees near a low white house at the other end. Below it again, a stream shaded by willows flowed slowly, widening out soon into a mill-pool; and here, as one stood in the Curé's garden, one could hear the mill-wheel slowly splashing and grinding round.

"It is the mill of the château," Camille told Constantine, as the young people followed the Curé through his garden. "And there is one of the wicked old customs that we hope to sweep away. The peasants are obliged to grind their corn there ——"

Suddenly the old priest turned and said with a sternness that startled the children — "Don't talk of those things, Camille. They need wiser heads than yours, or indeed of any that are meddling with them — and it is not well to discuss them with those who know nothing."

"But all the signs of the times, dear master!" cried Camille.

"I do not like the signs of the times, and I do not altogether believe in them," said the old man, adding in a lower tone — "They say, 'Peace, peace; when there is no peace.'"

Camille smiled as if he knew better. "They forget that calm follows storm," he muttered. "If it is only by struggle that we can hurry on the Golden Age — why, so be it, say I, and all patriots with me."

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE CHÂTEAU.

"And sure of all the folk I ever saw
These were the gentlest."

The parish priest of Mercy-le-Comte lived in two ground-floor rooms paved with flag-stones. In the outer one of these he gave the travellers their supper, the last rays of the evening sun falling through the open door and lighting up his kind old face and thread-bare cassock. They all sat down together — he, his young guests, Adrienne, and his housekeeper Virginie, a great friend of hers, almost as fat, and a person of great power. She brought the dishes one by one, smoking hot, from some mysterious corner behind the large fireplace. Betty and Con were not very hungry, Adrienne having fed them well by the way; but the manner in which Mademoiselle Virginie helped them was not to be resisted.

"Come, come! After a journey from England! No? But I will not have No said to me, my little gentleman. My master will tell you that it is I who rule this house. I have cooked all these things, and he and his friends must eat them without excuses.

There — that's better!" as she piled some new arrangement of eggs and vegetables on Constantine's plate.

"You have been so very generous to us, my good Virginie," said the Curé, looking on with a smile.

"Monsieur! But after a journey from England! And you said to me yourself — 'These travellers are to be received well.' — Come, Adrienne, my dear, another plate of eggs."

After supper, while the two women were clearing away, Camille plunged into a rather excited conversation with the Curé. Both talked so fast and with such immense animation that Betty, watching them, and understanding little of what they said, except that it concerned politics, felt rather afraid that they were on the edge of a quarrel. As soon as she realised that there was no danger of this — for Camille looked round at her and Constantine with a cheerful smile — she drew her brother away into the garden.

There the birds were singing sweetly; the loriot was whistling, as he flew with a flash like gold from tree to tree. In the quiet stream frogs were croaking and fish jumping, to Con's great delight, and the splash and creak of the mill-wheel lower down seemed to tone in peacefully and agreeably with the other evening sounds. From the church tower near by, the Angelus rang out its deep tones, reminding the children, in that fading light, of the curfew bell at home. They lingered long in the garden paths and by the side of the river, talking together as they had had no chance of talking since they left England. Constantine told Betty he liked

France, and was glad they had come. Betty could not say that; for her, though in some measure she felt the attraction, this country could never be like home, and always that nameless, unreasonable shadow lay in the background of what had been till now a confident and simple nature. She did not want Con to feel like herself, and was happy in his fearless enjoyment. They walked up and down together, her arm round his neck, till a figure suddenly appearing between two fruit-trees in the twilight made them start asunder.

Camille begged their pardon politely. He went on to make a long explanation, of which they managed to understand that Monsieur Gérard wished to take him to the neighbouring castle, there to play his violin before Madame la Vicomtesse, who was passionately fond of music. He did not want to go, for these nobles were selfish people who had done all the harm in France; his father did not like them, neither did he. But what would you have! and Camille shrugged his shoulders and waved his hands expressively. It was a case of going, of playing, or of disobliging his dear old tutor. There was not much room for doubt; he felt that he must go. And now the question was, had mademoiselle and monsieur any curiosity to see the castle of one of our nobles, or would they prefer going early to bed? Adrienne and Virginie were both at their service. No doubt they were fatigued, and it might be a little late before he and the Curé returned. "I know them, you see, these nobles. They must be amused; they have no consideration for low-born folks

like us. They may wish their music to go on till midnight—how do I know?" Another shrug, with a look of as much dislike and scorn as Camille's good-natured face knew how to wear.

"We had better go to bed," Betty began — for the wickedness of these French nobles had been borne in upon her by everything she had seen and heard since she set foot in France. Suppose they were to throw her and Constantine into some terrible dungeon till uncle Julius thought fit to ransom them! She had read of such things in history, and there was still, it seemed to her, something savage in the air of France. But Constantine rebelled against going to bed. He wanted to see the castle, and as Betty was ashamed to put her foolish fancies into words, they both set off with Camille, joining the Curé at his garden gate.

He carried a lantern, for the moon was not yet up, and after crossing the stream by a low bridge, their road led under the shadow of thick groves of trees. They seemed to be passing through the avenues of a park, or along the edge of a forest; the rays of the lantern fell on long grass growing about the ghostly trunks of trees. The night was warm and still; occasionally the distant cry of some wild animal fell on Betty's ear, and once she was startled by a great rushing of wings and a loud, melancholy hoot which seemed close to her shoulder, as a great owl, flying heavily and low, crossed the path just in front of them. Coming out from the shadows it was still dark, for the sky was cloudy. They turned a corner into an open space,

and the children were suddenly aware of a large building, with towers and long roofs, standing out black against the dark grey sky. They passed a round tower, skirted a long wall, while dogs began to bark fiercely at their approaching footsteps; then found themselves on the edge of a broad moat full of water, which gleamed suddenly as the light of the lantern fell on its surface. Then they came to a bridge, once a drawbridge, now fixed securely over the moat, for to many people the times seemed civilised and peaceful beyond any that had ever been known. The dogs barked louder, and now there were human voices also to be heard, and there were lights shining on a broad terrace beyond the moat, in the shelter of the tremendous old walls.

"Wait here a moment, my children," said the Curé to Betty and Constantine. "I see that Madame la Vicomtesse is taking her coffee on the terrace. I must ask if she will allow my English guests to join her party. Camille, come with me."

Camille muttered something and obeyed. The English guests held each other's hands very tight, when they were left alone in the dark at the end of the bridge, with forest and wild beasts and owls behind them and the great feudal castle before. This was indeed a new world into which uncle Julius had sent them.

There were stone pillars at the end of the bridge. Constantine, sure that he could not be seen, sprang suddenly on the base of one of these, and in a moment eagerly beckoned his sister up beside him.

"Betty, Betty!" he whispered. "I can see them all."

Betty could not resist the invitation. With a kind of fascinated terror she stole her first look at those 'nobles' of whom Camille had expressed so low an opinion. Ladies and gentlemen, they were sitting or standing about one or two small tables which held coffee and silver candlesticks. The night was so still that the yellow flame of the candles rose quite straight in the air, and steadily lighted up the faces and the dresses, both brilliant in their way, that were grouped round them. Four or five women, talking, smiling, fanning themselves; several men with hats in their hands, in powdered wigs and coloured and embroidered coats, with swords by their sides and an air of dashing elegance; one old man in a large armchair, with a grave, handsome face, talking apart in a kind manner to two young girls in plain white frocks; and one lady quite different from the others, on whom Betty's eyes dwelt at once, and to whom they returned. The rest of the party, it seemed to this young and ignorant foreign spectator, were like figures in a masquerade; this one seemed to realise her idea of what a great lady ought to be. She was a slight, young-looking woman, paler than the others, with straight and delicate features, unpowdered hair, dark and curling, dark eyes and finely marked eyebrows. She was looking up, listening, not joining just then in the talk of her companions, and she had a look of anxious expectation. Her dress, too, was far simpler than theirs — white

muslin, with a lace handkerchief on her shoulders. Betty could see the flash of the rings on her hand, as she made a sign to a young man, hardly grown up, who was standing behind her chair. He leaned over to speak to her, and Betty saw that the faces were very like, only that, while hers was sweet as well as melancholy, his was full of gloomy temper and pride. "He looks disagreeable," Betty thought. "He won't answer her rudely, will he? Oh, no, she smiles."

The smile of the Vicomtesse de Mercy was not only for her son; it was also, as the children immediately saw, a welcome to the Curé and his former pupil, who now, his red locks shaken picturesquely back and his violin under his arm, followed his old master into the lighted circle on the terrace, and made a low bow to Madame de Mercy and her guests.

"Look at Camille!" whispered Constantine, clutching Betty by the arm.

They could hear voices, but not what was said; this gave even a stranger attraction to the scene before them. It was like looking at a picture in some old book of romance, to watch those faces, bright colours, lively movements in the yellow glimmer of the candles, with the great walls behind them, and the overshadowing darkness all round.

They looked happy and untroubled, these people who were responsible for so much; they looked kind and pleasant too, most of them. Long after Constantine, whose young imagination never forgot that romantic scene — Betty remembered it for other rea-

sons — said to his sister — "There they were, Betty. A little gleam of artificial light, and the abyss of darkness round and about them, eternal night closing in upon them and their centuries. I see now that they were a type — Do you understand?"

But it took years for Constantine to see so far into the meaning of things, and at the time of Madame de Mercy's small dinner-party he and Betty were not much more than curious, interested children, who scrambled down suddenly in a great hurry of shame from the stone ledge to which they had climbed, at the sound of steps returning over the drawbridge, accompanied by the wavering light of the Curé's lantern. He was coming back to fetch them, with Madame de Mercy's leave.

She had risen to receive the Curé, and she was still standing when he brought the two young strangers into her circle of light and formally presented them to her. With all the simplicity of her appearance, her dignity was so great that Betty thought the Queen of France could not be more majestic. She stood squarely in front of the Vicomtesse, forgetting her manners and staring with wide eyes, a very rustic maiden indeed. Luckily Constantine was more equal to the occasion. His hat was in his hand; he made the Vicomtesse a low bow, though he was not yet Frenchman enough to kiss the slender fingers that were quite involuntarily held out to him. After this Betty recovered herself a little, and made a stiff curtsey, to which the Vicomtesse replied with a very graceful one. Her smile was

kind, but not amused; she was too courteous for that. One or two of the others smiled behind their fans in a different fashion, and exchanged glances with the gentlemen.

"Louis," said Madame de Mercy, "offer coffee to M. le Curé and Camille Durand, and to this young lady and gentleman. After that we will go into the hall and dance a little, as Camille has kindly brought his violin."

None of the new guests would take anything. The Curé never drank coffee at night; Camille, philosopher as he thought himself, would touch nothing in the house of an aristocrat; Betty and Constantine were too shy. She looked with awe into the young face of Louis de Mercy: his dark blue eyes set rather near together under straight, frowning black brows, the haughty, contemptuous curves of his nose and mouth; and yet withal, a certain likeness to his mother.

Two footmen came to carry the candlesticks before them, and thus lighted, the whole party walked into the house, under a low arched door that led from the terrace into a vaulted hall paved with shining, slippery slabs of white stone. It felt cold after the warm air outside. From this they passed on into a large, long saloon where the floor was of polished wood and the walls were hung with old tapestry. At the far end there was an immense fireplace, whose chimney-piece, richly carved, painted and gilded, rose to the beams of the ceiling; they also were painted in many bright colours. It was by far the most beautiful room that

the children had ever seen. Great tapestry-covered chairs stood in rows against the wall; in these some of the party seated themselves, while the younger ones remained standing. Then Camille, standing up by the fireplace, began to play dance music, melodious and slow; very different from the mad swinging measure to which he had treated the people of Bec-sur-mer.

The young strangers stood watching as one gentleman after another led a lady out to the middle of the room, and began to dance in a graceful, deliberate fashion. Camille knew how to make inspiring music. Presently the Vicomtesse herself was dancing, and by her smiling face it was plain that she enjoyed it. M. Louis had even come up, with evident unwillingness, and offered his hand to Betty, who blushed, and refused it positively: she felt awkward enough standing still among these people; what would it be if she undertook to dance among them!

The Curé had placed himself near Camille, and Betty and Constantine stood close together half way down the room; he pressed up against her shoulder, and his hand stole into hers. Neither of them had yet felt so lonely, so far from home and England, as inside the great white walls of the Château de Mercy-le-Comte, in this stately saloon, where these gay people were dancing. It was plain, as Camille said, that they were selfish, with no thought but of their own amusement.

"Oh, I hate them! Oh, I am glad uncle Julius did not send us to people like these!" Betty thought to herself; and yet, drawn by an attraction she did not

realise or understand, her eyes still followed the tall and graceful Vicomtesse through all the varied movements of the dance.

"Mademoiselle!" said a deep, pleasant voice close to her. She turned to see the handsome old man whom she had noticed on the terrace, just rising from one of the large armchairs behind her.

"Let me beg you to sit down, mademoiselle," he said. "You have had a long journey, I understand, and even young people have a right to be tired sometimes."

Betty thanked him, and sat down beside him, very straight and upright, while Constantine leaned on the back of her chair.

"You would not dance with my grandson," said the old gentleman, after a moment's pause.

Betty looked at him. He had a very proud face too, she thought; but something, an arch of the eyebrows, a delicacy of the mouth, gave it all the sweetness which young Louis de Mercy's face so much wanted. He did not look selfish or scornful; his smile was encouraging and kind.

"No" — she murmured. "I was afraid — I do not know the dance."

The tone of Betty's voice, sweet and low, was one of the few attractive things about her.

"And how comes it, mademoiselle," said the Comte de Mercy, "that my little town is to be honoured by the residence of yourself and of your brother? So our good Curé tells me, at least."

"Your little town, monsieur?"

"But yes — Mercy-le-Roy, the little town where I live. Do I not understand that you are sent to the charge of M. Durand, at Mercy-le-Roy?"

"I beg your pardon — I thought you lived here," said Betty.

"I have two houses," said the Comte. "My children live here chiefly, mademoiselle; I myself, as an anchorite, in a gloomy old dungeon at Mercy-le-Roy. So you see we shall be neighbours. How comes M. Durand to be trusted with such a charge?"

"I do not quite know, monsieur," stammered Betty. "I believe he is a friend of my uncle Julius, our guardian. He will educate us, and we shall learn French."

"You have learnt it already, it seems to me." Betty blushed crimson and shook her head. "A friend of your uncle! That sounds a little strange. But yes, I believe he is a clever man. He will educate you, no doubt," said M. de Mercy.

He stroked his face with a long thin hand and seemed to meditate. Then smiling at Betty, he slowly rose from his chair.

"Camille's music is very pretty," he said, "but for my part I prefer conversation. If you do not mind coming into another room, we shall be able to talk more agreeably."

He held out his hand to Betty, with a charming bow, one friendly corner of which seemed to include Constantine. The boy was a little disappointed; the scene before them was too gay, the music too attractive, to be

willingly left. Betty caught the shadow on his face and hesitated in her turn.

"Will they know where we are?" she murmured. "I mean ——"

"You mean Monsieur le Curé and Camille?" said the Comte kindly. "Yes, mademoiselle; they will see that you are with me, and therefore safe. Besides, our little musician must not expect to have everything his own way, which is rather the fashion of his kind, in these days. Will you come?"

Betty shyly laid the tips of her fingers in those which were ready to receive them.

M. de Mercy led the two children across the hall by which they had entered, from which a broad staircase led up and down, then through a room lined with books, then through another deep doorway into a beautiful room not nearly so large as that where they were dancing, but hung with still more splendid tapestry, and its great chimney-piece gorgeously blazoned with coats of arms. Here the chairs were set in a circle, as if for conversation. The Comte placed Betty in one of them, took one himself, and motioned Constantine to a stool close by.

"Here we are quiet and alone," he said. "And now, mademoiselle, is it too much to ask that you and your brother will indulge an old man's curiosity — an old man who likes your young faces, who feels for you as strangers, and would gladly be your friend — will you indulge him with the history of the circumstances which are bringing children like you to the care of the excel-

lent M. Durand? Remember, I shall be your nearest neighbour; and with your guardian's permission, I hope this is only our first meeting."

Betty and Con gazed in increasing wonder at his grey powdered head, defined against the light, his features like those in some old miniature, looking as if cut out of ivory and delicately tinted; his lace ruffles, his velvet coat, the gold snuff-box with which his long fingers played absently. They had never in their lives talked to anybody at all like him, and it seemed hardly right to trust an appearance so unfamiliar. But the charm of his manner and the sweetness of his smile were irresistible. What motive could he have but kindness, in thus interesting himself in the history and fate of two little way-worn foreign travellers?

Before five minutes had passed, the two children found themselves confiding in this old French gentleman, so far as their own French would let them, as frankly as if he had been their grandfather. They told him about King's Cross, about their father and mother, about uncle Julius and the sudden resolve to send them over seas. He listened gravely, asking many questions, tapping impatiently sometimes with long nails on the snuff-box. After a long time Constantine asked a leading question. He had soon descended from his high stool, and was sitting at the Comte's feet, looking very small and childish as he gazed up with his dreamy brown eyes.

"Then, sir," he said, "you do not like Monsieur Durand. Is he a bad man?"

"My dear child, pray remember that I said nothing of the sort," answered the Comte quickly. "What is that I hear? Thunder! And who comes here?"

The tapestry was gently pushed aside. Constantine, startled, sprang to his feet; and the Vicomtesse de Mercy glided alone into the room.

"It thunders, monsieur. It rains," she said. "What is to be done with these poor children?"

CHAPTER V.

SHELTERED FROM THE STORM.

"I have thee close, my dear,
No terror can come near."

The storm that night was tremendous. Out in the Forest of Mercy, great trees were struck and split by the lightning; and the thunder roared and rattled round the castle as if it would shake its towers to their foundations. But storms might have spent their force on primeval rocks with as much effect as on those white stone walls, three yards thick and more than three centuries old.

Those guests who were not staying at the castle had hurried away before the storm became violent; the Curé also had gone back to his house with Camille, who was seriously disturbed at leaving his young charges behind, and had consented unwillingly, and only because he must, to the Comte's proposition of driving them in his own coach to Mercy-le-Roy the next day.

Betty lay awake, and the lightning flashed through chinks in the shutters. In the pauses between the thunder-claps, when a dead silence reigned, but for

the hiss of the descending sheets of rain, she listened anxiously for Constantine's breathing, and felt satisfied in the knowledge that he was peacefully asleep. For herself, she could not close her eyes. The excitement of these strange circumstances, of being tossed to and fro among new and foreign faces, would have been enough to keep any ordinary girl awake; but the interest of the present, for Betty, the remembrance of the evening and its sights, the wonder of lying in a small silk-curtained bed, with Constantine sleeping in another, in a stately little room with a vaulted ceiling which opened straight, through a short passage in the wall, from a second drawing-room beyond that where the old Comte had talked to them — all this new experience was hardly realised in the deep anxiety regarding the future which his words and looks had aroused in her mind. Betty was old enough to ask herself very seriously who and what this M. Durand could be, to whom her uncle had so freely trusted herself and Con. It was true that Camille was a kind young fellow, and Adrienne inspired confidence; but nothing could be plainer than that the Comte de Mercy was sorry for the two little foreigners. What would M. Durand do to them? What sort of life were they going to? Betty was sure that the old Curé too had looked at them pityingly. Something rose in her throat, as she lay on the great fringed pillow, and her eyes felt sore and wet. Was there no returning? Must she and Con be conveyed like baggage to their journey's end, no matter what sort of person was to receive them

there? Was it really impossible to travel back to England? Betty had some money, some notes sewn up in her frock, which uncle Julius had given her before they started, with rough advice not to spend it. But then, if they could and did go back, where should they find a home in England? She was very sure that Uncle Julius did not mean to have them at King's Cross. "Oh, mother, mother! Oh, dear father! if you had known!" Betty drew a long breath that was almost a sob.

Then she opened her eyes very wide and rubbed them, for there was a light in the room, and this time it was not the lightning flashing in through the shutters. A little sound, a light step on the tiled floor; the door was softly shut, a lamp set down; and then a tall figure in white, with long brown hair curling on its shoulders, came gently forward and stood by Betty's pillow. She started up, half frightened, half happy, for after the first moment's bewilderment she recognised Madame de Mercy.

"Lie still, my child," said the Vicomtesse in a whisper. "Are you frightened at the storm? No? Ah, brave little Englishwoman! And your brother?"

"I think he is asleep," murmured Betty, staring in wonder.

"So much the better — wise little man. Well, you are surprised to see me? I was visiting my own children, to see that they were not too much alarmed, and then it occurred to me that our young strangers might feel almost too strange, if the thunder was keeping them awake. So I came to visit them too."

Betty lay looking up at this gracious visitor. The curtain threw a shadow, so that Madame de Mercy's face was not plainly to be seen. Standing there in her white draperies, the girl thought she might have been an angel, or else — sad and sweet fancy — she might have been Betty's and Con's own mother come to comfort them, to take care of them, lonely in this far-off land.

Just then a new flash, stronger than the faint light of Madame de Mercy's lamp, lit up the room brilliantly for a second. The roll of thunder that followed it literally shook the castle, which for a moment, in that awful crash of sound, seemed to be crumbling to a heap of stones above the heads of its inhabitants. As the great clatter died slowly away, Betty found that something unspeakably strange had happened. She was lying in Madame de Mercy's arms, held tight to her breast, with soft hair falling about her face. She supposed afterwards that she must have started up in a sudden terror and thrown herself there, but she never quite knew. At the time she only felt that she did not want to move, but must; and she drew back, flushing hotly at what seemed such great presumption.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she murmured most humbly, shrinking back to her pillow.

Madame de Mercy stooped and kissed her forehead.

"I hardly remember such a storm," she said, after a moment's silence. "And your little brother sleeps through it, just as my children do. Nothing wakes them. But as for you, I don't think it is quite the

storm that keeps you awake to-night; after all, you are as young as my Victoire, I suppose. How old are you?"

"Fifteen," said Betty. "Constantine is thirteen."

"He looks younger. And you love him dearly, do you not?"

"My mother and father left him to my care," said Betty.

"Ah! poor children! And you have no friends except this uncle of whom you told my father-in-law?"

"No. And I could do nothing. He sent us to France, and I know our father would have said that Con was not to go to France. He ought to grow up among our own people," said Betty, with sudden energy, "and learn to hate——" She stopped short. Was it really necessary to hate the French? And above all, must she not remember her manners?

A slight, sad smile flitted across Madame de Mercy's face.

"Yes, I am quite of your opinion," she said. "It is better for a boy to grow up in his own country."

Betty fancied that her manner was colder, that she was going away. She stretched out an eager hand. "Oh, please forgive me, and don't go yet."

Madame de Mercy sat down in a large armchair beside the bed. She leaned her head on her hand, and seemed to be thinking.

"Please," said Betty, after anxiously gazing at her for a minute or two, "do you know Camille's father—where we are going?"

Madame de Mercy was a little startled by the question. She looked round at Betty doubtfully, and the girl saw again what had first struck her on the terrace, how sad and worn her face was, with all its sweetness.

"There is no harm in Camille," she said. "He may not be very wise, but he has a genius for music, which always attracts me, and Monsieur le Curé is very fond of him. I think he is an honest boy. I know his father by sight, and by report."

"You do not like him?"

"I have no reason to like or dislike him. He is not one of our acquaintance," said Madame de Mercy.

"Oh, tell me something more," murmured Betty. "Is he a bad man?"

"There are a good many bad people in France now, my dear. Probably he is not worse than the rest — but you will see for yourself. He will do you no harm. If I thought he would — my father-in-law agrees with me — we should by some means prevent you from going to him. It would have been easy a few years ago; we could simply have kept you here in spite of him, without going beyond our rights in any way. But things are more difficult now; just at present all these things are in confusion, and it is better for us not to stretch a point, if possible."

"I don't quite understand ——"

"And I cannot quite explain. But great changes are taking place in France. I see the reason for much that is likely to be done, and I shall never wish to

defend such rights as are founded on injustice. And M. de Mercy — my husband — says that all will be well; he has lived in hopes of seeing this day."

"Does he think it is the Golden Age, like Camille?"

"Something of the kind," said Madame de Mercy, with her smile which was almost sadder than tears. "Yes: he believes in it; and certainly he has done his best to bring it on. If men like him were to arrange things, all might indeed be well. But suppose the power were to pass into the hands of men like Jean Durand."

"What would he do?"

"I do not know."

"Is M. de Mercy, your husband, at Paris now, with all those other people?"

"Yes."

"And are the King and Queen there too?"

"Yes."

"What are they all doing?"

"Helping to make a new world," said Madame de Mercy.

Betty would have liked to ask more questions, but another of those great flashes just then illumined the room. The crash that followed it died away into growls, then into moans of thunder, which seemed to pass on to the forest and then return to murmur threateningly about the towers of the château. This time she lay still on her pillow, watching Madame de Mercy, who sat looking straight before her with thin hands clasped and thoughtful eyes. When all was still

again, except for the rushing of the rain, she turned to Betty and said — "This is not a time for talking politics. Listen:" and she drew out a little book from the folds of her gown.

Betty stared with large eyes. Could she listen? Would the Vicomtesse expect her to join in some Popish prayer? Did she imagine that an English girl was likely to be of the same religion as herself? But the next moment she learned a lesson that she never forgot, for she soon recognised that the Vicomtesse was reading a French version of old familiar words. It was the 107th Psalm, "Confitemini Domino," and there was plenty of meaning in it for Betty, who felt herself and Con only too far "astray in the wilderness out of the way," as well as for the Frenchwoman who had watched and understood the spirit of the time, and who guessed that a great wave was rising which would sweep away all that was good with much that was evil. Even then, when the first voice of the Revolution had hardly spoken, Madame de Mercy expected for herself and her dear ones "oppression, plague, and trouble," though she could hardly dream to what a terrible extent they and so many innocent thousands would be "evil intreated through tyrants." And it was not till long afterwards that Betty, looking back on that night of mingled storm and peace, understood the thoughts, the presentiment of coming sorrow, as well as the calm faith ready with praise and thanks through all, that were expressed in her friend's reading of that 107th Psalm.

When the Psalm was finished Madame de Mercy

would not talk any more. She bent over the bed and again kissed Betty, stroking back her dark hair.

"Now sleep, Betty," she said. "The worst of the storm is over. I will send my woman to wake you in the morning, and you and your brother will go safely in my father-in-law's coach to Mercy-le-Roy. And remember, my child — I may not have another opportunity of telling you this — you are not friendless in France, and you must never permit yourself to feel so. Send me word if you are in any trouble: come to me, if M. Durand will let you. Magdeleine de Mercy is not a person of much influence, but her friends will tell you that she is true to them."

Betty murmured something and kissed her hands. In another minute she had taken her lamp and gone away, softly, quickly, as she came. Betty, lying with wide-open eyes in the silent darkness, began to wonder whether it had not all been a dream, first the storm, then the visit of a white-robed angel to guard her through its terrors. Before she had decided this, her aching lids began to droop and fall; a sleep, so heavy that no moderate thunder could break it, took possession of all her tired being. When Madame de Mercy's woman came into the room next morning, and opened the shutters to let in a flood of sunshine, one English child was as fast asleep as the other.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAISON VERTE.

"Behind me lie the sheer white cliffs, the hollow
Green waves that break at home, the northern gales,
The oaks above the homesteads in the vales;
For all my home is far, and cannot follow."

Mercy-le-Roy was a cheerful little town with a market, a central point for the lonely villages scattered in the wild country round about, much of which was still heathy common and pine forest. No high-road passed through the town. It lay on sloping ground in the loop of a river, which flowed through the park of the castle, anciently forming part of its moat, and then round by the foot of the hilly churchyard. The town had no walls or gates. It had grown up gradually from a village in the precincts of the castle which had once been royal — hence its name — but had been given by François I. to one of his favourite courtiers, the Comte de Mercy, who already possessed a stronghold in that country. In times of civil war or special danger of robbery, the people of Mercy sent all their valuables into the shelter of the castle walls, and took refuge there themselves. The very name of their *seigneur*,

the shadow of his great white towers, meant safety; it had been so for centuries, all through the time of that feudal system whose day was now over.

Very bad roads, roughly paved, like all the roads then, led to Mercy-le-Roy. Formerly the forest had closed in upon the town, but during the last hundred years the slopes above it had been cleared, and were now covered with vineyards, where a sparkling wine famous in all that country was grown by the energy and speculation of M. Jean Durand. He exported a good deal of this wine to England, as we know, in a quiet way: the journey to the coast was long, but he found it more convenient than shipping his barrels down the Loire, which would have been possible for him. Bec-sur-mer was a remote little seaport where people asked no questions. M. Durand considered himself the great man of Mercy-le-Roy, though his satisfaction was not without drawbacks. It was enraging, for instance, that the Comte should have rights over his vineyards, and that it was therefore necessary to send a certain number of barrels every year to the cellars of the castle. The Comte had a good many other privileges which exasperated M. Durand, for as nearly all the trade of the little town passed through his hands, and as he was also mayor of the place, his contact with the Comte's steward was frequent and disagreeable.

There were few prettier little towns in the district than Mercy-le-Roy. Within a mile of it the forest ceased, and then the heathery moorland, with scat-

tered groups of trees, gave place to an avenue of stately chestnuts, which, with the river low down on one side, and the bright vine-clad slopes rising on the other, led straight into the paved square of the town. Immediately opposite, across the broad sunny space where the market was held, rose the walls and great gates of the castle. Wild flowers grew in the crevices of the stones, and grass waved on the battlements; the gates stood generally wide open under the rusty, unused port cullis, into the great courtyard, the *cour d'honneur*, with its deep black shadows and dazzling glare from the white stone. The townspeople might go in and out as they pleased; the Comte was good to all, and liked to live among them as a father among his children; though unlike his son, the Vicomte, he was not ready to welcome the changes that were coming upon France.

On the right of the town square was the church, very old and stately, with an alley of clipped limes leading round by its east wall to the churchyard and the river: on the other side of this alley, with its gabled north end to the square, was a long house roofed with slabs of grey mossy stone, deep eaves overhanging rows of small windows. Part of this was an almshouse for the old and poor; in the end nearest the square lived the Curé and his assistants.

On the left as one entered the square from the avenue, beyond a narrow street which climbed the hill towards the vineyards, there was a large house facing south, its front overgrown with old vines. It stood a little back in a court of its own, and had a good

many buildings connected with it, as well as a large garden beyond it to the east. It opened on to the square by a tall pair of iron gates painted green, which were generally shut, unlike those of the château. This house was called the Maison Verte. It had been originally built by the Comtes de Mercy for some of their household, or for an overflow of guests, in the old days when they entertained kings and princes, and when the great hunts in the forest of Mercy were famous throughout France. But later on they became poorer; their favour at Court dwindled; and for a short time the Maison Verte became a convent of nuns, a small branch of the great Abbey of Fontevrault. Early in the eighteenth century, however, the number of the Dames Fontevristes began to fall away, and the Abbess recalled her nuns from Mercy. Then the house, after being inhabited for a time by a brother of the Comte, a clever and eccentric Abbé, who died there, was bought with the vineyards by M. Durand when still a young man, and made the centre of the trade which, in one way or another, gave employment to most of the people of Mercy.

Another long winding street left the square just beyond M. Durand's garden wall, and crept down, with mean houses crowded up together, between that and the great wall of the château. The rest of the square was filled up with old white houses, some untidy and dilapidated, some with their fronts quite finely carved in stone, many sheltering little dark shops under their projecting upper stories. At a

corner between the avenue and the church, where another narrow street wound down to the river, there was an old inn which might have figured in any romance of the Middle Ages, its dark balconied front shadowed by an enormous chestnut-tree, the grandfather of the avenue, its horse-trough and benches set out hospitably on the uneven pavement.

The Comte's coach rattled through the square that May morning, the four horses making a great commotion among the children, pigs, and poultry that scrambled out of the way. With much grinding of wheels and stamping and sliding of horses, the coach drew up in an unaccustomed place, at the gates of the Maison Verte. The Comte himself stepped out upon the stones, and handed Betty down as if she had been a grown-up lady.

"Here are your guests, Durand," he said, — "your pupils, or whatever their uncle intends them to be. They are charming children, in spite of any strange circumstances that have brought them here. Take care of them, I beg. I commend them to the kindness of Madame Durand."

He bowed low, stepped back into his coach, and was driven away before Betty could collect herself and her words sufficiently to thank him for his great kindness. The green gates were swiftly shut again, to the disappointment of the idlers who had followed the coach round the square, and the two children found themselves standing in a sunny white yard in front of a large vine-covered house, with a family group staring

at them, and a chatter going on so fast and furious that they could not understand a word of it.

It was a comfort, however, to see two well-known faces, those of Camille and Adrienne, and also to catch sight of their baggage piled in a corner of the yard. But Betty's heart sank a moment later and all her fears returned, as she ventured a second and less confused glance at Camille's father and mother. She saw a large, fat, smooth-faced man carrying a broad-brimmed straw hat in his hand; his hair, plastered close to his head, was tied behind with a ribbon; his small eyes blinked eagerly, and there was a red angry flush on his cheeks. Beside him stood a tall, thin woman, so brown, so hard-looking, that she might, as Con afterwards remarked to his sister, have been cut out of a plank of wood. Her eyes were her only good feature, and seemed the only living part of her; still they were not pleasant eyes, for they seemed to contain a smouldering fire that burned with a peculiar red light. Camille's eyes had something of the same subdued brilliancy, but with him it was mild and agreeable. Madame Durand's expression, without being exactly bad, was forbidding.

It flashed at once on Betty that there had been a storm in the Durand household, and that both Camille and Adrienne, who looked much depressed, had been well scolded for arriving without their charge. And the scolding was not yet over. Tears were running down poor Adrienne's fat cheeks as she talked and gesticulated violently in reply to her master's re-

proaches. Camille stamped from one foot to the other, waved his arms and talked also at the top of his voice, pointing at the children, shrugging his shoulders, casting up his eyes in what looked like an appeal to heaven. Then M. Durand turned suddenly to Betty and Constantine.

"This is a bad beginning for you, my children, yes, a most foolish and disastrous beginning, that this idiotic son of mine should have led you into a wasp's-nest. Not your fault, Camille? Ah, but you need not have obeyed that narrow-minded old Curé of yours. What does he know, a silly old man like him! It is overwhelming, it is crushing, to see intelligent beings bow down at the footstool of these so-called nobles — ignorant men and women like ourselves, only lower in the scale of humanity, because they will not realise or understand the greatest of truths. What is it, Camille, you French ass with a Roman name? What is the first lesson you learned in your cradle, my son?"

Camille remained silent.

"Come then, my little cabbage!" said the deep voice of his mother.

A dark flush mounted in Camille's face as he looked at Betty.

"That all men are equal," he muttered, and then in a still lower tone, "but I am not sure that I believe it!"

"What is that? What do I hear?" cried his father, still more furious. His fists were clenched, and he made a step towards Camille. Betty made a hasty

movement forward. Though she did not understand all M. Durand's angry words, she knew that his rage was caused by the kindness she and her brother had received at the château.

"Monsieur, it was not his fault," she cried. "He wished us to go to bed, he advised us not to go to the castle, he said the nobles were selfish and he did not like them. He went himself out of kindness. Then the storm came on, and we could not refuse to take shelter for the night. We did not know it would displease you. I beg you will forgive us all." Betty said this with an effort, and with great dignity, simply because she felt that Camille must be justified, and also that it would be well to conciliate this man to whom her uncle had sent them.

"Mademoiselle is an angel!" cried Adrienne, while Camille fell on one knee before her and kissed her hand, looking up with grateful and adoring eyes. Poor Betty coloured deeply.

"Rise up, you grovelling slave!" exclaimed M. Durand. "That I should have such a son! Why, the boy might be an aristocrat himself."

"No, no, I detest them," murmured Camille, springing to his feet. "But mademoiselle defended me. She has greatness of soul, and the little monsieur also. Father, you know how to honour true greatness. If you were in your right mind, you would at once do homage to mademoiselle."

"My right mind, impertinent!" said M. Durand. "Unworthy son of a philosopher, I suspect you, I have

no faith in you, none." But there was a twinkle in his eyes which reassured Betty: his anger, which alarmed her, was evidently passing; he turned and made her a bow.

"There, my little demoiselle: I do you homage, as this gentleman desires it. We will forget this unfortunate beginning, and will see to it that you have no more poisonous company of aristocrats. Ah, ah! the Golden Age is coming, when everything that exists will have to show a good reason for its existence. No more oppression then: no more privileges. No more airs: no more insolent patronage. Then we shall see that one man is as good as another. I hope you left your excellent uncle, M. Maynard, in good health."

"Very good, thank you, monsieur," replied Betty.

"Dinner is ready, and we are all very hungry," growled Madame Durand. She stretched out two long arms, and taking a hand of both Betty and Constantine, led them into the large shady living-room which opened on to the court.

Thus began the children's life at Mercy-le-Roy. It was monotonous, but not unhappy or uncomfortable, for M. Durand evidently felt a good deal of responsibility towards Mr. Julius Maynard, and wished to do his duty as thoroughly as possible. Betty disliked him from the beginning, this fat, false-looking man, with his manner that was sometimes violently excitable, sometimes cold and mocking. But she never had to complain of any rudeness to herself or to her brother. M. Durand might consider himself their equal, but he

behaved as if they were his superiors — and as to neglect, she only wished they might see less of him. Though a very busy man, occupied with his farm and with his vineyards, with the sale of his wine, with different mysterious trades and agencies which connected him in business with all the country round; and above all, deep in politics, studying the progress of the States-General in its memorable last sitting at Versailles; sometimes collecting the peasants and townspeople and haranguing them on their rights, or on living by the laws of Nature, with long quotations from Rousseau; though busy in all these ways, besides being mayor of the little town and exercising more influence than the Comte himself, M. Durand gave an hour or two every morning to the education of his young English charges. He was a clever man; Constantine assured Betty of that; and for his part, the boy enjoyed these lessons, and threw himself into Greek and Latin and mathematics with an eagerness that he had never shown at King's Cross. There was nothing mechanical in M. Durand's way of teaching: ancient poetry and history worked him up into a state of enthusiasm; sometimes he would plunge up and down the room, waving his arms and shouting out lines that he admired, or more often drawing fancy pictures of life in some ideal republic under the rule of Nature alone. Constantine was rather attracted by all this, and the consequence was that he became a favourite with Durand. Betty, who was not poetical, and hated noise and demonstrativeness and hollow talk that meant noth-

ing to her, used to sit with her eyes on her book, paying as little attention as possible to their master's proceedings. Camille, who sometimes joined in the lessons, but was more often employed in some of his father's business elsewhere, used at first to look on admiringly at these fine frenzies, with which much of his own nature sympathised. Then his eyes would fall on Betty, leaning over the table in grave absorption, and gradually his smile faded; he found something even more worth watching in the English girl's quiet steadiness. And all his soul seemed to burn within him afterwards in helpless anger, when his father, whose quick eyes had noticed Betty and read some of her thoughts, made cutting remarks to him on "Ma'mselle Rosbif" and her stupidity.

Betty's own dignity kept her on courteous though stiff terms with M. Durand. She liked his wife better, finding her honest and straightforward, though not particularly agreeable, and believing in her good intentions. Madame Durand came from a town in the South, and was a *bourgeoise* of the most limited kind; all her interests were narrow and small, confined within the walls of her own house; her mission in life was to keep it clean, to prevent waste, and to save every penny she possibly could. She tyrannised over her servants, who, Adrienne at the head of them, bore her worrying with perfect good humour. "This — this is nothing," said Adrienne to Betty, who was startled by an outburst of rage over some spilt soup. "The vintage — that is the time to see the mistress in perfection. Then — mademoiselle *will see* ——"

Betty did not feel curious. She gradually lost her first shrinking from Madame Durand's harsh voice and ill-tempered eyes, and came to regard her patiently as a fierce sort of animal that ramped up and down doing its duty, roaring very loud but never hurting any one, spending its whole force on an extra cabbage cut by mistake, a mark on the floor, a hole in one of the best sheets, a scratch on the newly painted shutter, a broken plate, a candle left burning. Practically, Madame Durand was that special wheel in the machinery which makes all the other wheels go round, though it was a pity that she creaked louder than any of them. Adrienne, though a charming person, was inclined to be lazy. Betty soon realised that all the comfort and regularity of the house depended on Madame Durand, and respected her accordingly, for among her own traditions there was a love of order.

Madame Durand had no tenderness for the foreign children, though she never spoke to them unkindly. It was enough that she did her duty by them, and saw that they were well fed and lodged and treated with proper respect by the people. All the love and admiration she had was heaped upon her husband and son, and her one pleasure, her one idleness, was to listen to Camille's violin. Probably her one chief trouble was their want of religion, and in this matter alone she took her own and a different way. Every morning between five and six, when the church bell was ringing, Madame Durand strode across the square, sometimes followed by Adrienne, sometimes by another of her maids. Camille,

in spite of his friendship for the old Curé at Mercy-le-Comte, followed his father's example when he was at home, and only went to church as a matter of form on Sundays. Even an advanced thinker like M. Durand kept up that custom as yet; it was right for the Mayor of the town; and nobody believed him, or even thought him in earnest, when he said that all these things would be changed, that all this nonsense would be at an end soon. The Curé of Mercy-le-Roy, when such talk reached him, said quietly that M. Durand knew nothing of these subjects and was worthy of no attention; his neglect of his religious duties was well known, and it was well for him and his careless young son that they had a good wife and mother to pray for them.

Mr. Julius Maynard had taken the trouble to say in one of his letters that he wished his nephew and niece to be undisturbed in their religious opinions. Madame Durand looked rather coldly on these little heretics, as she thought them, but in obedience to her husband did not invite them to church. Betty, who had half feared persecution, and to be dragged to mass against her will, was glad at first to be left in peace on Sunday mornings with Constantine. They carried out their Bibles and Prayer-books into the wild and pretty garden behind the house, where long grass grew among the cherry-trees, and read their Psalms and Lessons there in the shade, a chorus of birds singing all round them, and friendly frogs joining in from a pond near by. Afterwards, on their first Sunday, Con fetched a

book and lay on his face in the grass, reading poetry — it was *Paradise Lost*, a small copy of which he had brought from home. Betty leaned her back against a tree and looked up through the branches at the blue sky with white clouds crossing it; but what she saw was the old street at King's Cross, and the people streaming through it and along the avenue towards the dark arch of the church door. At such times as these Betty knew what it was to be homesick.

CHAPTER VII.

A DAY IN JULY.

"Denunciation, vengeance; blaze of triumph on a dark ground of terror; all outward, all inward things fallen into one general wreck of madness!"

The Revolution burst on France with the taking of the Bastille, and the news of this, sent all over the country by galloping couriers, was not long in reaching Mercy-le-Roy.

The children were sitting at their lessons on a July morning. Their books were spread on a long table in a plainly-furnished room, the two windows of which, darkened by green shutters and shadowed by vine-leaves, opened on to the dazzling sunshine of the court-yard. Constantine was repeating to his master some lines from the *Iliad*, and M. Durand, in a remarkably good humour, marked time and emphasis with his head and hands, sometimes nodding approval violently.

"Good, good, my boy, you have the soul of a poet. Homer himself would rejoice to hear you. And now, Ma'mselle Betty."

Betty rose and repeated the same lines. M. Durand's face became pinched and twisted, as if he was swallowing some nasty medicine.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, that will do, that is quite enough. I perceive that you know your lesson by heart. But, good heavens!" and he struck his hands together — "Where is the fire, the sacred enthusiasm of poetry! Tell me, I beseech you, how can two children born of the same parents be so different in soul! Do not distress yourself, Miss Betty, I do not blame you; it is Nature that arranges these things. Her gifts are not always scattered with the same generosity. You, my dear Constantine, may one day lead a nation. Mademoiselle your sister will probably order the dinner and manage her household with great success. We have not all the same powers. One is born to command the Senate; another, the kitchen."

"But, monsieur, is not everybody born equal?" said Constantine, rather timidly.

He was clever enough to see through M. Durand sometimes, and he could not sit still to hear himself praised at Betty's expense.

"Hush, Con: I don't care," muttered Betty hastily in English, while the master's round eyes grew rounder, and he stared at the bold little fellow who dared to confront him with his own theories.

Suddenly the morning's work was broken in upon by a great shouting in the square.

"What is that?" said M. Durand, hastily pushing back his chair and going to the window.

Then the door flew open, and Camille sprang into the room; he was flushed and excited, and his red locks flew out wildly.

"Father, father! A messenger has come post-haste from Paris. The Bastille has fallen. Yes, they are levelling it with the ground."

"Good news, glorious news! Then liberty triumphs. Ha! this will be a lesson to the aristocrats," cried M. Durand.

"Should we send word to M. le Comte, father?"

"No, no, let him alone. He will hear it soon enough. The country will blaze with bonfires. Lucky if ours in the square does not spread to the château. They are all Bastilles, these dens of oppression and privilege. Levelled with the ground, did you say! But how did it come about? Where is the messenger?" and M. Durand rushed from the room.

Camille, lingering a moment, smiled and nodded to the English children with their bewildered faces.

"Camille, what has happened?" cried Constantine.

"Didn't you hear, my friend? The Bastille has fallen — the great prison, the home of tyranny. It is the first step on the road to freedom. France has shown kings and nobles that she will be free. Pardon! I must go."

Camille bowed low — his manners were always irreproachable — and darted away after his father.

"Shall I come too" — Constantine was beginning, but Betty stretched out her hand to him.

"Don't go, Con. It is something horrid, I think. Didn't you hear what M. Durand said about the Count and the château?"

"What did he say? I didn't understand."

"He hoped the château would be burnt down."

"He didn't say that, Betty!"

"He meant it — Sometimes I do hate M. Durand."

"I hate him too when he is rude to you about poetry, and talks in that nasty, mocking way."

"Oh, that makes no difference in the world to me," said Betty with a fine scorn. "I always knew that poetry belonged to you, and prose to me. I need not have come to France to learn that."

While the children talked, a great clatter was going on both outside and in the next room, the large living-room, into which their school-room opened. There was the tramping of feet, the clinking of glasses, the dragging about of chairs, the clatter of many tongues. Suddenly M. Durand came to the door and threw it open.

"Advance, my children!" he said. "Listen to the news this gentleman brings from Paris — news of the greatest event that has happened in the memory of civilised man."

The messenger, dusty and sunburnt, with a red and blue cockade in his hat, was sitting at the end of the table, and round him pressed all the chief inhabitants of Mercy-le-Roy — the apothecary, the notary, the inn-keeper, the principal shopkeepers and officials — while a crowd of lower grade pushed itself in at the door. Camille was pouring out his father's best wine. Madame Durand looked on with a gloomy countenance, while Adrienne and the other servants stared in the background.

Betty would rather have shrunk back out of sight into the farthest corner of the school-room, not from fear, but from that instinctive dislike and shrinking with which a French crowd always filled her; Constantine, however, curious and excited, pulled her forward, and they stood together against the wall inside the large room. No one took any notice of them; the wonderful news was far too engrossing.

The children heard it all, though at that time they hardly understood it all. They heard how Paris had risen and armed itself, had marched to the Bastille, and when the Governor refused to surrender it, had taken it by storm. The story of this siege and capture was told with every exaggeration as to the heroism of the Parisians and the wickedness of the Governor, M. de Launay. From that first day, in fact, all over France, what has been rightly called "the legend of the Bastille" was told in its wildest form. One would have thought the old state prison, just as necessary to the state, and for the times just as humanely governed as any other prison, was a den of murderous wickedness. Even then, though she knew nothing of the truth, Betty felt sick with horror as she listened to this messenger's account of the barbarous murder of the Marquis de Launay and his subordinate officer De Losme, at the hands of as wild and unreasoning a mob as any that ever did its best to wreck a government.

"You hear, my friends!" cried the messenger. "Paris has set you the example. She has shown

you how to treat your oppressors, how to punish those privileged ones who have tyrannised over you for so many centuries. Tell them of the fate of Launay. Long live Liberty, my friends! Death to tyrants! Down with privilege, down with oppression!"

Some of the people in the room, and outside in the court, shouted in chorus, waving their hats. Several poured out glasses of wine and drank them to the heroes of the Bastille, and to the confusion of the tyrants.

"Ah, but we want something more than talk," the messenger went on. "You will have to defend yourselves. Your homes are in danger. Do you think these tyrants will suffer themselves to be defeated, insulted, without revenge? No — they are sending brigands among you — they are bringing the English upon you."

"Monsieur Durand, why do you listen to this liar?" said a voice. "Why do you allow him to stir up the townspeople to crime?"

For a moment there was a dead silence. Then every one saw the tall figure and pale face of the Curé of Mercy, who had just made his way in at the door.

"Foolish people!" he said, looking round. He stood a head and shoulders taller than most of the crowd, and his manner was cold and commanding.

"This man knows very well," he said, "that the best heads in the kingdom are at work on a constitution which will give us all the blessings of liberty. Because the mob of Paris, led by fish-women, chooses to lose its head and tear down the public buildings of the nation,

and murder the King's faithful servants for resisting — do you suppose that France will be a free country any sooner for that? No! to me and to all reasonable men such doings prove the need of stronger prisons than the Bastille, where your precious army only found seven prisoners, and those kindly treated."

"M. le Maire de Mercy, why do you not seize that traitor?" cried the Paris messenger passionately.

But Jean Durand had a thick stratum of prudence underneath all his revolutionary chatter. He was not yet sure that the popular side would prove the strongest, nor even that his neighbours would back him up in an attack on the Curé, who was more respected than any man in the town. This was only at the beginning of things, and he could not yet know how far he might advance in safety. It was one thing to celebrate the popular triumph, even with bonfires; it was as yet another thing to make an open attack on the Church.

"Peace, peace, my friend," he said, blinking his little eyes hard, and laying his hand on the messenger's arm. "No violence here, I beg of you."

"Violence! Who is violent? That priest called me a liar. Come, I have another cockade in my pocket. He shall stick that in his hat, and then I will forgive him."

"Do you take me for a mountebank, sir, to wear your ridiculous cockade?" asked the Curé; and with a very scornful smile he walked out of the house, the people making way for him in silence.

To appease the messenger, Durand took the revolu-

tionary cockade and fastened it into his own hat. Then, the Curé being gone, the Parisian began again to talk mysteriously of brigands, of armies of masked men coming by night, sent by the privileged orders to murder all good patriots and plunder France for them. Again he talked of the English, and declared that ships full of soldiers were hovering on the coast, ready to land and devastate the country on a signal from the French king.

"You are deceived, you are betrayed, my poor good people. The brigands are coming, and you suffer yourselves to be intimidated, to be driven like lambs into the jaws of a flock of wolves. Do you ask me what you are to do? Does not your own courage tell you? Put yourselves on a level with your oppressors. Destroy them, in place of their destroying you."

The good people of Mercy stared as they listened. They had no objection to a little excitement; they were vaguely alarmed; but after all, most of them were men of sense, and they did not at once see, luckily for their little town, that it was their duty to set everything in a blaze. And the two English children in the corner stared as they listened. They were not capable of much reasoning, and Constantine enjoyed the excitement of the moment, and even laughed out loud, so that Betty pinched him, when the tall Curé refused the cockade and walked so grandly out of the room. When the messenger went on talking of the English fleet among other dangers, Betty and Constantine suddenly felt a hand on each of their shoulders. Betty had

just noticed that some of the people at the other end of the room were looking towards them suspiciously. She was not very much surprised, looking up, to find Adrienne standing behind them, with an anxious expression on her fat face.

"Madame sent me," she whispered. "She saw that horrid fellow, the blacksmith, peeping in at the door, and she heard him say something about English spies. Come along with me, my children."

"But Adrienne — we are not English spies, and I want to stay — I want to hear it all," Constantine objected.

"Anyway you are English, and all our tempers will be in a queer state, as long as that man stays in Mercy," whispered Adrienne in answer. "Who cared for his Bastille and all his nonsense! I was glad M. le Curé made him angry. But come with me, little ones, or it may not be safe for you."

It was no use disobeying, though Betty too was unwilling to leave the exciting scene. She slipped away with them through the school-room door, out by one of the windows into the garden, and then through the kitchen up stairs to Betty's own little room. Constantine slept in a larger one with Camille on the other side of the passage.

"There, keep quiet," said Adrienne, "and I will see that you have your dinner."

It was very easy to say "keep quiet," but not so easy to follow that excellent advice, when the whole air was full of such wild excitement, such rumours, such

stories, true and false, as were spread over France in that third week of July, 1789, with the great news of the fall of the Bastille. Adrienne herself, when she came up a little later from the kitchen with the children's dinner, could not help telling them that more news had been brought into the town, this time from the *diligence* which did not actually pass through Mercy-le-Roy, but within a short distance of it. Another messenger on horseback, too, had come from Paris; he had brought gazettes with the latest news and his pockets were full of tricoloured cockades for the good patriots of Mercy.

"They say they will send a deputation to the château," said Adrienne, "with a cockade for M. le Comte, and if he will not wear it they will denounce him. And for the defence of the town they are going to demand arms everywhere, and they are sure that M. le Comte has muskets stored in the cellars, here and at Mercy-le-Comte. They must have all the arms they can get, to defend it against the brigands, you understand. And do you know, my children, the times are dangerous. They say" — Adrienne lowered her voice, and looked at them hard and strangely — "they say that in some parts, not so far from here, châteaux have been burnt and the owners murdered because they would not surrender their arms at the demand of the people."

"I wonder if M. le Comte knows that!" said Constantine, looking at his sister. "And about the Bastille — I wonder if he has heard."

"Adrienne," said Betty, standing up with both her brown fists clenched, "do you mean that they are

going to burn the château here, and to murder M. le Comte? I believe they are. I heard M. Durand say that the bonfire might catch it. Is that what you mean?"

"No, no, mademoiselle. The master may talk angrily — he does not love M. le Comte — but he is not so bad as that, you know. Besides, this is a town, and we are more civilised. It's true, I should not like to be out at Mercy-le-Comte in these times. You remember the Curé's Virginie. She told me the people there were very ignorant: they don't even love Madame la Vicomtesse, though when the fever was so bad she nursed them all like an angel."

"She is an angel," said Betty, very low.

"Yes," said Adrienne; but she shook her head. "I don't understand all these things," she said, "but then I am only a poor woman. They say that it will be better for all of us in the time to come, when the new constitution is made — but then I'm not so sure that the people who don't like the old laws will like the new ones any better. However, I know nothing, nor do you, my children. Only keep quiet up stairs for to-day. The town is in a bad state. M. Durand and M. Camille are pleased, but madame thinks as I do, and we mean to keep quiet indoors and let them light up their bonfires and shout till their throats are sore."

"And not burn the château!" said Betty.

"No, no, dear mademoiselle, you must not take it so seriously. Let us hope for the best. That poor Monsieur le Comte has enough to trouble him, in any case,

for I heard them saying that that Governor of the Bastille, the one they killed, was an old friend of his. Poor gentleman! he will never hunt again."

"Don't talk about him," said Betty, hastily. "Adrienne — don't go — when are they going to demand arms at the château?"

"How should I know, mademoiselle?"

"Does M. le Comte know they are coming?" asked Constantine.

"How can I answer such foolish questions?" replied Adrienne, impatiently. "Don't concern yourselves with M. le Comte, my children. His affairs are none of ours. Be thankful that you are in the safest house in the town, and keep yourselves as quiet as you can."

Adrienne shuffled out of the room. The two children, standing by the window, distinctly heard her slide the heavy bolt of the door. Constantine darted across and shook the door violently, but she was already stumping down stairs, and took no notice of the noise.

"Betty — Betty — we are shut up!" cried the boy, and burst into passionate tears.

For a moment Betty was strongly inclined to join him. She was not sorry, certainly, to be out of hearing of the horrors of which fresh news seemed to arrive constantly. It was impossible to understand much of the real state of things, and indeed she could only conclude that this strange nation had gone mad. All this seemed like a queer fashion of welcoming in the Golden Age they talked about. But though one could do nothing and understand very little, it was

horrid to be shut up like helpless prisoners in a little room looking on the garden, where the excitement of the town only reached them in the shape of distant and confused noise. Betty was just as miserable as her brother. But instead of yielding to the temptation of tears, she said to him in a much sterner voice than usual, "What are you doing, Con? An English boy, and crying like a baby! Nobody has hurt you, and if they had, you would have no time to cry."

Con rubbed his eyes, choked down his tears, and leaned dismally on the window-sill.

"Well, it seems to me there's time for anything," he said, "if we are to stop all day in this dull hole."

"Yes," said Betty, standing beside him, and gazing out with steady eyes into the quiet shades of the garden. "But why should we stop here all day, I wonder! They will all be too busy to look for us. Let us go to the château and tell M. le Comte all we have heard. He had much better know."

In a moment Constantine's tears were forgotten. He started round to face his sister. "Betty, you are a magnificent girl. But how are we to get out?"

"Oh, my dear, that is easy. One evening, when you were gone to bed, I had left a book in the garden. I climbed down from this window and back again. It is perfectly easy; the thick stems of the old vine make a very good ladder. Then don't you know that piece of the garden wall where there is an old trellis — down in the corner against the lower end of the lane? Well, one day I climbed up and looked over. There is a heap

of stones on the other side, nearly as high as the wall. Stones that had been picked off the fields, I think, and left there to mend the lane. Then nearly opposite there is the door in the park wall, where the Comte's gardeners go in and out. I heard Camille say one day that they always leave it open in the daytime. We can go in that way; it will be better than showing ourselves in the square. They might stop us, especially if they think we are English spies, you know."

As Betty explained all this, she was conscious that her own heart stood still, for she vividly remembered certain unfriendly looks that had met hers when the English fleet was talked of. But it was worth the risk, she thought. The old Comte held an honoured place in her recollection, for he had shown great kindness to the young strangers, and had called himself their friend. And his daughter-in-law, the Vicomtesse — Betty had for her one of those deep childish adorations which are sometimes as strong and lasting as many friendships of later years. Betty had several times told herself — nobody else — that she would die for the Vicomtesse. She did not know that such a thought could ever have a chance of being carried into action.

"Let me go first to show you the way," she said to Constantine. "It is no use waiting; they will all be at dinner now. Don't be afraid, Con: you won't fall. Where a girl can go, a boy can follow."

"Did I say I was afraid?"

"Hush!" murmured Betty, already on the low window-sill, preparing to swing herself over, and laying

hold of the thick vine-stem. "Wait till I am on the ground, and then come after me as quietly as you can."

In a few moments they were both on the grass under the window. A short run over the grass brought them to the thick shade of an alley of limes, and down this they raced, hand in hand, towards the wall at the end of the garden.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASTERS OF MERCY.

"Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate."

THE old feudal castle of Mercy-le-Roy had gardens and a park to the east of it, on the side away from the town. The great hall and the two chief staircases opened on the large courtyard through which was the principal entrance, but both to north and south there were side doors and staircases leading to the inhabited rooms. The chief of these looked out on a high eastern terrace, which sloped to a lower terrace and then to what was originally the moat, fed by the little river that flowed below the town; but the present Comte's father had drained the moat and laid it out in stiff flower-beds after the Italian fashion. He had also planted cypresses and other formal trees and shrubs on the terraces, and ornamented them with statues, so that the Mercy gardens were in style not very unlike those of Versailles. He had faced the rugged east front of the castle with new white stone, and made the windows of his stately saloons open straight

upon the terrace, which stretched majestically from end to end, set here and there with groups of statuary and square green boxes in which old orange-trees grew and flowered. In this July weather the whole garden was full of the scent of orange-blossoms.

The old Comte was pacing slowly up and down this terrace, leaning on his gold-headed stick, carrying in his hand the Paris gazette which had brought him the news of the taking of the Bastille and the cruel death of his old friend. His pale face was paler than usual, his eyes were more stern; he took no notice of two greyhounds, his constant companions, which played about him as they followed him up and down. It was in the full heat of the day, and the terrace glowed yellow in the sun; the southern towers were only just beginning to throw a shadow, in which one would have fancied it pleasant to linger; but the Comte shivered in the heat, and paced along in the sunshine as if nothing had power to warm him.

"But this is not a revolt; it is a revolution;" he said to himself, using unconsciously the words of the Duc de Liancourt to King Louis XVI. "What are we to do, good heavens! This is all the result of weakness. What will Bernard have to say about his friends now? Will he and all these foolish *doctrinaires* see that we must make a firm stand in times like these, or else there will be no more power of stopping? 'Golden Age!' ah, no, an age of blood. Injustice, cruelty, mob government. That the thousands of orderly citizens should sit still and look on while a

mob storms the King's prison and murders its faithful Governor! Was he likely to surrender at once to a troop of murderous wretches? Would I, would any man, have done so in his place? Treason, treason! and this is what they call the birth of Liberty. An encouragement, truly, to make new constitutions and laws for a people like this. 'Tis simply putting arms into the hands of the disaffected. Down, Cri-cri, my dear dog; be calm, I beseech you. I am too sad to play with you to-day. I see nothing ahead but darkness, and I could find it in my heart to wish myself with Launay. What is all that mad shrieking in the distance? Does our delightful M. Durand think it necessary to organise a municipal rejoicing? Men like that, I suppose, are the men of the future. Well, they may take the power from us, but I for one will never give it to them of my own free will. What is the matter, Cri-cri? an invading mob? Well, we are ready for them."

The old man's cheeks flushed slightly, and frowning, he drew his sword an inch or two from its sheath. Then he pushed it back and smiled.

"My own people! Launay's fate has disturbed my nerves, it seems."

Cri-cri and Coco had both pricked their delicate ears and growled. They now started off at the full speed of their graceful limbs towards the end of the terrace, where through a group of cypresses a flight of steps led down to the lower garden. But they came back immediately, playing and dancing round two slight,

bare-headed young figures; and when they reached their master, the gentle Coco was running with a boy's hand on his collar. Constantine did not wait for any formal announcement to the Comte; that indeed was impossible; running up to him with the dog, he dropped on one knee and hastily kissed his hand. Betty, walking sedately after, made a low curtsey and stood rather awkwardly silent; at that moment she remembered that neither she nor Con had anything on their heads, that his clothes were stained with ink, as well as with green moss from the wall over which they had climbed, and that she was tied up in a large apron, an ordinance of Madame Durand's for school hours. All this matched very ill with the old Comte's elegance, with the cared-for splendour of that high terrace and the stately house that rose above it.

"My English friends!" said M. de Mercy in a voice full of kindness, while, troubled and grieved as he was, his smile and bow might have been meant for the most beautiful lady in France. "I am charmed to see you, dear young people. I have often thought of inviting you to visit me, but I knew that the Durand prejudices were strong, and I waited to make the attempt till towards autumn, when my daughter-in-law and her children, I hope, will be here. I am glad you have taken the matter into your own hands, mademoiselle."

He glanced from one to the other, a shade of curiosity mingled with his politeness. Con was kneeling on the ground, each arm round a dog, Cri-cri and Coco struggling to caress him, while the expressive brown

eyes in his lifted face were fixed on M. de Mercy. Betty stood looking down, crimson with embarrassment: she did not know how to begin, how to explain their extraordinary visit. It seemed to her that the Comte knew nothing, that he had not even heard of the taking of the Bastille, much less of the death of the Marquis de Launay. And if he was really his old friend!

"Do me the honour to come into the house," said the Comte, holding out his hand to Betty. "I think Baptiste left some fruit there, which is quite wasted on me, but my friend Constantine may like a peach or two. Is there much fruit in M. Durand's garden, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Betty, very low.

"But we are not allowed to gather it for ourselves," said Constantine.

"Ah, I dare say not: Madame is a careful person, I believe."

M. de Mercy led Betty up a low flight of white steps, and in at a high window, near which stood a small ebony table loaded with fruit in silver dishes and several decanters of wine. It looked like a feast in the Arabian Nights; the peaches, grapes, and other fruit were so large and so beautiful in colour; they might have come from some magician's orchard, or from Aladdin's cave. While the Comte piled grapes on a plate for her, Betty looked round the room, and thought that no royal palace could be more splendid. It was not very large; the ceiling and walls were

painted with wreaths of flowers and little rosy angels, with sheets of looking glass let in here and there, which repeated the room a dozen times over. The floor was polished till it shone; the furniture was all white and gold and cream-coloured brocade, with flowers worked upon it in all sorts of delicate colours; the curtains of the three high windows were of the same beautiful brocade. For a minute Betty was lost in admiration. Then, as the Comte gently offered her a chair, and presented her with a plate of fruit, she suddenly burst out, "Oh, monsieur, we did not come here to have fruit. We came because we wanted you to know about all these dreadful things. Please, we thought you ought to know, and perhaps nobody would tell you — they have taken the Bastille and killed the Governor, and the messenger said they ought to do the same sort of things all over France, and they are coming to ask you for arms, and I think perhaps if you don't give them what they want they will burn the castle."

"And they want you to wear a cockade," added Constantine, hastily, "and M. Durand says we are all equal, but I don't believe it."

"It is a pretty idea," said the Comte, smiling sadly.

"You won't wear the cockade, will you?" asked Constantine, with much anxiety. "M. le Curé said he would not."

Betty glanced at her brother and made him a sign to be silent. Young as she was, the impression of that moment was too strong ever to be forgotten: the

wonderful, old-world beauty that surrounded her, of the room with its Louis Quinze decoration, and of the stiff terraced gardens, carefully tended, up through which she and Con had made their way: the calm sunshine; the delicate scent of orange-blossom; the old man with his powdered hair, velvet coat, thin white hands, pale and distinguished face to which her words had brought a look of pain and the slightest possible flush, though his gentle high-bred manner did not show the smallest agitation. This, for Betty, was an opportunity of insight into a world she had not seen before, a world that after this year, 1789, no one would ever see in perfection again. It had great faults, that world, and could not, probably, have gone on living as it was; but at least it died magnificently, and a clever man who knew it said long afterwards that with it the sweetness of life had passed away.

"And, my dear children, you came to tell me this?" said M. de Mercy.

He sat down near Betty, folding his hands on his stick and looking at her kindly. "And without M. Durand's knowledge, was it?" he went on, at which Betty blushed again, feeling as if she had done something underhand and wrong. "I only ask," said the Comte, "because I am afraid you will feel his anger. But we can arrange that: you shall not go back to him. Eat your peaches, Constantine, my friend. And you, dear mademoiselle, let me offer you these grapes — and a little glass of Burgundy?"

"No, thank you, monsieur, I don't want anything,"

said Betty, rather wistfully; and she added after a moment, "You have heard the news, then?"

"Yes, I thank you. I have read it all in the gazette, — the account of these doings in Paris, at least. The signs of the times have been serious lately, and I was not very much surprised at the outbreak. Let us hope it is only a short storm which will clear the air. That is what my son thinks. I have had a letter from him. He thinks that after this the three estates will work together and understand each other. Certainly some good ought to follow — it has been dearly paid for. You mention the death of the Marquis de Launay; he was an old friend of mine."

"Oh, we were afraid so. Adrienne said she thought so," murmured Betty.

The old man looked at her rather vaguely, and then sat for a minute quite silent, his face bent over his folded hands.

"He died for his King: he died doing his duty. It was death in war, civil war; yes, in foreign war our heroes are respected; they do not often fall into the hands of savages. Well, enough of this. And you tell me, mademoiselle, that M. Durand contemplates burning my house down, besides making me wear some eccentric cockade. A little adding of insult to injury, is it not?"

Betty hardly knew how to understand or answer the faint, bitter, ironical smile with which the old man now spoke, as he opened his gold snuff-box and delicately took a pinch of snuff.

"I thought you ought to know the things they said, monsieur," she murmured shyly.

"Yes, my dear child, it was a generous thought. You are brave and kind, both of you, and I must see that you are safe out of the way of this popular excitement. Do not be frightened for me, I beg of you. I and my walls are capable of resisting any mob that Mercy can produce, I think."

"They pulled down the Bastille," said Betty under her breath.

The Comte smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, who knows! But they were led by more determined ruffians than our good Mayor, I fancy. Come, at any rate we will not be troubled till these events actually arrive. Remember, there is all this fine fruit waiting to be eaten. Constantine, my friend, have pity on Cri-cri and Coco: they adore the little sweet biscuits you see in that dish."

Betty took refuge in silence. She could not understand the light and graceful philosophy which so willingly threw serious subjects on one side, and turned to talking of trifles and playing with dogs and a child. Constantine, to whom the whole matter was a varied and charming excitement, entered readily into the Comte's humour, and enjoyed the next half-hour thoroughly, while his sister looked on for the most part in speechless surprise.

Presently a sudden noise broke upon the secure quiet of the château. Doors in the distance were opening and shutting; heavy boots came clanking along the

corridor. Betty, as she sat in the great brocaded chair where the Comte had placed her, felt herself turning red and pale by turns, and lifted her eyes to his face in a wondering appeal. Would the mob find him here, unprepared, playing with his dogs and Constantine? She had not time to think of the danger to herself and her brother, before the folding doors of the room were set wide open, and a servant announced loudly — "Monsieur le Vicomte."

"Ah, my son! Nothing could happen better," said M. de Mercy, rising from his chair, and quietly pushing the dogs aside.

Into the room came a tall, slight man with a curiously sweet face, in plain riding-dress, very dusty. He made a low bow to his father, and then advanced to kiss him on both cheeks. He held his cocked hat in his hand, and the children's quick eyes noticed that a tricoloured cockade, like that the Curé had refused to wear, was fastened into its brim. Betty took Constantine's hand and drew him towards the window, while the two gentlemen were exchanging salutations. Her first idea was to escape, but then it seemed unmannerly to go without a word of good-bye, so they stood together near the window, in the shadow of the curtains, and the Vicomte de Mercy did not seem to perceive that any one was there. Betty looked at him earnestly, for she knew at once that this was the husband of the Vicomtesse, and that he was looking forward, almost as confidently as Camille Durand and his father, to the coming of the Age of Gold. Betty no-

ticed that there was not much resemblance between the old Comte and his son; his handsome delicate features were far more nearly reproduced in his grandson Louis. This man's face was of a plainer, squarer type; he had not the same look of race, of high breeding; his brow was broad and thoughtful, his large grey eyes were set far apart, and had a dreamy, enthusiastic light in them. His fair hair, unpowdered, was simply tied with a ribbon. Flushed with the heat of his journey, anxious and troubled at this meeting with his father, whose opinions differed from his so widely, Bernard de Mercy hardly appeared to advantage; yet Betty on this first sight of him was ready to trust him as one of the best men she had ever known. He showed her a new type of French noble: such men, one imagines, if they had been more numerous, might have guided France to freedom by a better way than through seas of blood and fire.

The Vicomte talked very fast, and Betty and Con, though they were tolerably used to French by this time, had some difficulty in understanding him. The subject of his talk with his father was of course the taking of the Bastille, but he did not seem anxious to enlarge much on that, and dwelt more on the doings of the States-General, past, present, and to come. From what he said it appeared that all the best hearts in Paris, and even at Versailles, were full of joyful enthusiasm. Those who were afraid of the people did not understand them. "Do right and fear nothing! Make all men equal before the law: do away with all privi-

lege, and let the nobles be the first to sacrifice themselves on this altar of unselfish patriotism. No great reform was ever wrought without some madness to be regretted; and after all, this Bastille riot was brought about by the foolishness of those in authority. There was something to mourn over, certainly. Perhaps M. de Launay did not quite understand his duty. It could not be altogether a bad event which set the whole of France rejoicing. As to those who said that the right course was to leave France because of these troubles, and who counselled the King to resist the will of the nation, they were foolish men and bad patriots."

In this way the Vicomte talked to his father. "Yes," he said, "the days of privilege are past. If we are to justify our existence, monsieur, we must place ourselves on a level with our countrymen; we must make the good of the country our first thought."

"Not our duty to the King? If that is the case, Launay was indeed mistaken," said the Comte, tapping impatiently on his snuff-box.

"My dear sir, my dear father," cried the Vicomte, waving his hands in the air, "our duty to our country teaches us our duty to our King. The King should be the first of patriots. He is so, indeed; no one, more than His Majesty, feels the necessity of reform. But he is surrounded, I say, with rash and evil counsellors."

"Well, well, enough of this!" said M. de Mercy. "You know, of course, that your charming patriots are robbing and burning all over the country, demanding arms, stirring up strife everywhere. The two faithful

friends you see there have come to warn me that M. Durand is going to demand arms from me, and to request me to wear some ridiculous cockade — on my honour, Bernard, you wear it yourself. Come, that is too much. Do me the favour of giving it to Cri-cri for a plaything."

The old man's colour rose, and his eyes flashed, as he pointed contemptuously to his son's hat. The Vicomte coloured too.

"I attach no importance to it," he said. "But it is the badge of those who mean France to be free — the sign of equal justice for all. It is also something of a safeguard — as you may find, monsieur, when the mob of Mercy attacks the château."

"What! owe my safety to a bit of ribbon!" laughed the Comte. "Why, you are more cautious than our good Curé, who refused to wear it in the face of a number of howling patriots. Come forward, my dear Mademoiselle Betty, and oblige me by telling my son all that you told me, of the reception of the Paris messenger."

"Who is this young lady?" said the Vicomte in a low voice, as Betty walked into the middle of the room.

"Mademoiselle Maynard, a young English lady," said his father. "She and her brother have the misfortune to be pupils of our excellent Durand. They have been sent here to learn French, at a rather uncomfortable moment for themselves. But I propose that my daughter-in-law should take charge of them. I can send them to Mercy-le-Comte in the coach this

afternoon. Now, mademoiselle, your story. But first sit down, I beg."

Betty, however, remained standing. She told her story well and vividly, while the Vicomte looked and listened with polite gravity, and his father's face wore a fine smile of melancholy scorn. When Betty paused, the old man turned to his son with lifted eyebrows and a questioning air, but said nothing.

"I think," said Bernard slowly, "that in the bottom of his heart old Durand is too wise a man to allow a popular rising in Mercy-le-Roy. He has great influence here, and he will not wish to lose it. More power will every day be in the hands of the municipal officers. By moderation Durand will gain more than by violence, which would discredit him in the country."

"My dear," said the Comte, "Durand is sure to do what is most to his own advantage; there I agree with you. But I am not sure that foul means will not answer the best for him, especially if he can shelter himself behind the madness of the mob. He hates me, you must remember. And I do not think he loves you, which shows that he is unjust by nature."

"Father," said the Vicomte, in his grave, simple way, "if you will leave me to deal with Durand, I will save you from any injury or annoyance. Only keep yourself out of sight. I saw preparations for dancing and bonfires in the square; it was not likely that Mercy would be behind other towns there. I cannot stop that: perhaps I would not, if I could: but I will keep the people in a good humour."

"If they have already seen you with that distinguished ornament in your hat, it ought to be enough for them," said his father. "And then later — are you going on to Mercy-le-Comte? Will you take my English friends with you?"

"Monsieur," said Betty, bravely, "we thank you with all our hearts, but we will go back to the Maison Verte. M. Durand has done nothing to hurt us, and Madame and Camille and the servants have been kind. I do not wish them to think that we have run away, when we only came because we thought you ought to know — Besides," she added, colouring, "M. Durand would know where we were, and that would make him more angry."

"Mademoiselle," said the Vicomte, "receive my compliments. You have the soul of a heroine. I have always honoured the English nation without personal acquaintance. Now I feel myself justified."

He made her a low bow. Betty grew more and more crimson. Such high praise from this grave, absent gentleman was more confusing than any number of the old Comte's pretty compliments. She curtseyed deeply, seized Constantine's hand and led him through the window, for she felt that the father and son ought now to be left together. The boy was half unwilling to leave that enchanting room and the friendly greyhounds, and inclined to linger on the beautiful terrace among the orange-trees; but Betty, being the strongest of the two, made him run with her along the level and down the steps, then through intri-

cate paths and down steps again, till they came to the little door in the wall where they had entered. There they slipped out into the quiet lane below the lowest houses of Mercy, the roofs of which could be seen round the next corner. They were hardly in the lane, when both exclaimed almost with terror, and stood still, for Camille, his fiddle under his arm, met them face to face.

"There you are!" he cried, his eyes shining with excitement, and Betty saw that there was a cockade in his hat too. "What foolishness! Where have you been? What have you been doing? No, for pity's sake tell me nothing."

"Does your father know? Is he angry with us?"

"No, mademoiselle. Luckily, he is too much occupied with politics to know what goes on in his own house. My mother, Adrienne, we are all distracted about you, but my father knows nothing. Come; in case it should reach his ears, follow me into the square. You have nothing on your heads! Never mind, you are with me; and you must wear these, for our people talk unpleasantly about the English."

In another moment Betty and Con found themselves decorated like M. le Vicomte and other good patriots, with tricoloured cockades, which Camille fastened cleverly to their shoulders.

"No, tell me nothing: come along," he said. "If any one speaks to you, it is I who brought you, remember."

The children could do nothing but follow him. As

they went up the narrow street into the square, Constantine plucked impatiently at his cockade.

"Betty, may I pull it off, nasty thing?" he whispered.

"No," said his sister. "It is safer to do as Camille tells us."

It was a wild scene in the square. All the inhabitants of Mercy-le-Roy, generally quiet people enough, were singing and dancing in rings round and round, throwing their arms round each other's necks, shouting "Long live Liberty!" "Down with tyrants!" "No more taxes!" "No more work!" "All brothers and sisters!" "The reign of peace and plenty!" "Down with the nobles!" "Down with riches!" "We shall all be rich!" and many more cries of the same kind. The afternoon was advancing; the shadows of the old chestnut-trees were falling across the white stony square. In the middle, near the great town well, an enormous bonfire had already been built, to be lighted in the evening. The Comte's servants, rather alarmed by all this noise and the threatening cries they heard, had shut the great castle gates which generally stood open on the square. Near these gates, with envious eyes fixed upon them, stood M. Durand, the Mayor, in his chain of office, consulting with one or two of his most trusted fellow-townsmen. Should they demand that the gates should be opened, and institute a search for arms, if the Comte did not at once consent to all they asked? Was the moment come for really strong measures — measures that would show every one who

was the strongest man in Mercy? Not yet, it seemed; for even as they consulted, the heavy gates rolled back once more upon their hinges, and the tall figure of the Vicomte strolled gracefully out into the square. He wore his hat with the cockade, but as he approached the Mayor he took it off and held it high in his hand. His quiet eyes rested for a moment on the excited crowds, and as they saw him, there fell a sudden silence.

"Monsieur le Maire," he said, in the clear well-bred voice that rang like a bell. "I congratulate you and your good townspeople of Mercy-le-Roy on the dawn of Liberty in France. I assure you that the patience of a few months will be rewarded by the universal reign of brotherhood and peace. There shall be no more poverty, no more suffering. M. le Maire, let me join you in inviting our fellow-citizens to rejoice, and as the son of your oldest inhabitant, let me claim the honour of putting the first match to-night to your splendid bonfire. And now let us begin to dance. Where is our friend Camille with his magic violin? May I have the privilege of leading out Madame Durand, if she is here?"

M. Durand, at the first sight of the Vicomte, had scowled and turned pale. But he was obliged to smile and accept these civilities, for some of the people were already shouting, "Vive Monsieur le Vicomte." They were easily led, as he very well knew, in one direction or another.

Betty and Constantine, half hidden in the gateway

of the Maison Verte, and once more under the protecting wing of Adrienne, to whom Camille said shortly — "They were with me" — looked on at the hastily arranged dance, Constantine shaking with laughter as he saw the wooden figure and sour face of Madame Durand led by the Vicomte down the middle and up again. Camille did wonders. The power of that fiddle of his seemed equal to an orchestra. He played even more wildly than at Bec-sur-mer, and to a much more excited crowd. The château gates stood open all the evening, but no one attempted to go in. M. Durand tried to look satisfied. As twilight came on, the Vicomte thrust a lighted torch into the great pile of wood in the middle of the square, and it flamed fiercely up, casting the light of its red flickering blaze on the quiet trees, the old houses, the grass-grown walls, the church, from whose door the Curé looked out sadly, but hardly less scornfully than the Comte from his upper window. All the dark faces of the people, lit up by the fire, looked wilder and more threatening. Great barrels of wine were rolled into the square, some from the Maison Verte, some from the château, some from the inn. Adrienne put her hand on Betty's shoulder and said, "Come, little ones. As I am too fat to dance, and you are too young, suppose we go up stairs. And mind you, we will have no more climbing out of window."

Betty hid her face in her pillow that night, and tried to stop her ears with the blankets. She could not bear the shrieks of the crowd, the noise of their

rejoicing, or the light which could not be kept from streaming in at every window. There was nothing really to frighten her, of course; it was all rejoicing, and nobody had been hurt or ill-used in any way, thanks to the Vicomte's behaviour. But Betty thought she could understand now how châteaux were burnt and people murdered in other parts of France, and it was with no enthusiasm, but great disgust and dread, that she remembered this celebration of the taking of the Bastille, this dawn of the Revolution.

CHAPTER IX.

LIFE IN EXILE.

"Another storm brewing; I hear it sing i' the wind."

It was the children's habit to write to their uncle once a month. He never took the trouble to answer these letters, and they never knew that he had received them. M. Durand heard from him on quarter-days, with enclosures of money, and generally passed on some message to the intent that M. Julius Maynard hoped his nephew and niece were well, and diligent in their studies. After the July experiences, Betty wrote several times to her uncle that she and Constantine did not like France, and would be glad to return home as soon as he was good enough to send them directions for the journey. But these letters met with no more notice than the former ones, and Betty, who had no particular reason to suspect her uncle of wishing to be entirely rid of herself and Con, began to think it possible that M. Durand had never allowed them to leave Mercy. In any case, it seemed that there was nothing for the children to do but to stay where they were and wait for better times. So, as the clouds of suspicion and terror darkened slowly over France in that strange

morning of a Golden Age, as the doctrines of a common humanity, a universal brotherhood, showed day by day more plainly how much they were worth, the two English children lived their life in M. Durand's house about as monotonously as if no great changes were going on in the world round them. After that day of the Bastille rejoicings, Madame Durand told them that they were never to go out alone: these were times when young people were best in the house, she said very truly, and neither Betty nor Con had any particular wish to disobey her, knowing that she meant kindly by them, in spite of her rough outside. So Con plunged more deeply into his studies of the poets; and as M. Durand, busier every day with politics, had not much time to give him, he began an epic poem on the death of Charles I., and read pages of it to Betty as she sat working in the garden. Betty now submitted to be left behind in the way of book-learning. M. Durand having hinted many times that she was hopelessly stupid, she was not unwilling to turn to his wife and to Adrienne for lessons in needlework, cooking, and housekeeping, and they found her an excellent pupil. She also went back to her old favourite occupation of digging in the garden, and made flowers grow successfully in the little patch of ground that Madame Durand allowed her to call her own.

At the vintage, when the whole house and town were in a turmoil, she watched the process with deep interest. The picturesqueness of the scene on that sunny slope was not lost on her; the quiet, brown-faced people

stooping among the bright rows of vines — it was hardly possible to imagine these people dancing and yelling in the market-place, or, as already in some parts of France, robbing and murdering those who were better off than themselves — the great baskets full of purple grapes, carried on men's shoulders down the hill to the cart drawn by gentle white horses which conveyed them to the *pressoir* in M. Durand's large yard. While they gathered the grapes, and while they trod them with red-stained *sabots* in the press, as their fathers before them had done for centuries, the men sang old songs that seemed to help their work and pass the time away. Sometimes Camille would come amongst them, and sitting on a wild bank overhung with blackberry briars — the English children had never seen such enormous blackberries before — he would play on his fiddle some sweet old pastoral tune or some gay jig which made the old people look up and laugh, and set the young ones dancing. This was not when Madame Durand was in the vineyard, however. Her harsh voice approaching soon put an end to the fun: she had a way, as Adrienne had told Betty, of being here, there, and everywhere, making a terrible fuss, and keeping every one to his duty. Neither was M. Durand a pleasing element in the vintage. He would come strolling easily up the slope, humming an air, keeping time with his hand to Camille's music; and then, when he reached the violinist, he would say to him suddenly and sharply, "Why are you here? You will break my heart. Idle yourself, you cannot be satisfied with-

out making others idle. Do you know who you are? Nero — simply Nero, fiddling away while Rome is on fire. Yes, Rome is on fire, idiot. Go back to the office this instant, and copy those writings I gave you. Go, Nero! not another word!"

And the poor musician with his kind heart and foolish head, admiring his father, believing in a good time coming, hating both work and aristocrats, was obliged to stop his music and hurry away down the hill. "Ah, Miss Betty," he would say, "I was born to be a minstrel in the Middle Ages."

"Oh no, Camille; you would have had to play before lords and ladies, and you would not have liked that."

"Ah, well! after all, I would rather draw out lists of their property for confiscation."

One ought always to remember, with regard to the great French Revolution, that its earlier scenes were by no means equally violent in all parts of France, or even in the different towns and villages of any one province. There were even quiet places, we are told, where nothing happened at all, so that people hardly knew of the changes that were going on, except by news from outside which travelled then so slowly. There were places where nobody was made to suffer; where the new laws were carried out gently and reasonably; where the nobles gave up their feudal rights willingly, and lived on among the old neighbours who had learnt to love them and who were ready to defend them against any attack from outside. Such places and such neighbourhoods were rare; but there were some of them,

especially in the west of France, where the *seigneur*, the lord of the castle, was still regarded by his people as their father; and it was in this spirit, in opposition to the unbearable tyrannies of revolutionary power, that the peasants of the west rose, led by the nobles, to fight for Church and King in La Vendée.

Mercy-le-Roy was not in La Vendée, though not far from its borders; but the old spirit of loyalty lingered there to a certain extent, and was strong enough to be a very effectual check on men like Durand, whose object in taking up revolutionary ideas was considerably more his private advantage than the public good. The old Comte de Mercy, who had always been both just and generous, would have been respected in both town and country, but for the misrepresentations of his enemies; and his son and daughter-in-law were not only respected, they were loved, by some few decent peasants about Mercy-le-Comte. There were plenty of vagabonds, of course, who would have enjoyed burning and plundering the two châteaux; but Durand, whatever was in his heart, did not yet think it worth while to set all the respectable people against him. He had to confine himself to carrying out with what strictness he could the new laws which came down from Paris; and these gave him many opportunities of annoying M. de Mercy. His secret wish was — and the Comte knew it well enough — to force him and his family to emigrate, in order to save themselves from future troubles and serve the King in a foreign land. Every one knows how the nobles crowded out of

France in those early days of the Revolution; and every one blames them, without perhaps considering what their situation was, and that to many of them the only chance for life and liberty, the best chance of bringing France to her senses, seemed to lie beyond the frontier. Hundreds of M. de Mercy's friends emigrated in the months that followed the taking of the Bastille. He might possibly have followed their example, for he took the darkest view of the government and the prospects of his country; but his son Bernard, for whom, much as they disagreed, he had the deepest love and reverence, absolutely refused to leave France, and one need hardly say that the Vicomtesse would not desert her husband.

Bernard smiled at the idea of danger — "What? among their own people, and while they were ready to give up every privilege, every right, everything that made their lot better than that of their neighbours? Danger! when they were keeping open house at Mercy for the peasants, feeding a hundred of the poorest every day in the hall, and dancing with them on the green in the evening! If bad men had the upper hand here and there, was that a reason why all well-intentioned people should leave the country?"

And the Vicomtesse said to her eldest son, who was inclined to share his grandfather's opinions and to distrust the people, "Your father and I will do what we think right, and God will take care of us all."

Thus for a long time it seemed unlikely that the Comte de Mercy's castles and lands would become

national property, as those of so many nobles did, finding their way later into the hands of ambitious patriots, of speculators, of men like Jean Durand. And thus, day by day, the hatred of such men for the nobles deepened, and they were watched with greedy eyes in all their goings out and comings in.

Betty and Constantine Maynard lived on quietly and safely at the Maison Verte till the autumn of 1792. Without being personally affected by them, they heard all the changes in the government, all the measures of so-called reform, discussed with satisfaction in the Durand family. News of massacres and confiscations, of insults to the royal family and attacks on the Church, satisfactory as it may all have been to M. Durand, was not so openly detailed in his house. Madame Durand was not pleased with those measures against the clergy, for instance, which deprived Mercy-le-Roy of her old friend, its excellent Curé. The man who would not wear the revolutionary cockade was not likely to take the oath of allegiance to the revolutionary government, and so the Curé disappeared from Mercy, and a republican after the Mayor's own heart took his place. The good schoolmaster of the town was also dismissed for teaching loyalty to Church and King. Nobody could be found to replace him, and the children remained untaught; for it is a fact that the teachers set up by the new government in their new schools could many of them neither read nor write, and the children learned nothing but "republican principles," the result of which was a very ignorant generation in the years that followed the Revolution.

In 1789, of their own free will, the nobles had renounced all their feudal rights and privileges; but this was not enough to satisfy the spirit of the time; further renunciations, of their property and their titles, were demanded of them in 1790. Those who had emigrated found themselves ordered back into France on pain of losing their property, and very soon afterwards on pain of death; some few who made an attempt to return found their estates already confiscated and sold, and were themselves thrown into prison, too often only leaving it for the guillotine. The position of those who had not emigrated was in most parts of France frightful. Good and bad alike, they were in daily danger of being robbed, murdered, or at least imprisoned. Some escaped by hiding and disguise; some were still successful in getting out of a country where they could not stay in safety. In the meanwhile, they were subject to search and insult of every kind; the deeds of their estates, their family papers, were burnt at their gates. All these things, during those three years, went on growing worse and worse, and with the serious and terrible events which led on, as if down a steep plane, faster and faster towards the lowest depth, the Terror of 1793, there were mingled such absurdities as the forbidding of certain kinds of dress, the fashion of wearing a red cap, the public order that nobody was henceforth to be called Monsieur or Madame; all were alike *citizens*, and must be called so.

Mercy-le-Roy and its neighbourhood, up to the autumn of 1792, was not stained with any of the worst

crimes of the Revolution. Every new ordinance that arrived from Paris, either from the National or Legislative Assembly, or at first from the National Convention, which began its reign of cruelty in September, 1792, was received with bonfires and rejoicings, but without any open attack on the two great houses which were still inhabited by their owners, who thus showed a rare instance of patient courage in the France of that day. The old Comte sat alone in his beautiful rooms, and was not molested. All his papers had been burnt in the market-place; the Mayor had demanded them in the name of the government, and M. de Mercy had no power to refuse. He had also given up all the arms in the house, except his sword and half a dozen pistols. He never showed himself outside the gates, for after the Curé was gone, he would not, unless dragged to church by force, hear mass from the "constitutional priest" who had taken his place. Hardly any servants remained at the château; good republicans found it a degradation, and liveries were no longer allowed to be worn; but the Comte was watched over tenderly by his faithful valet Baptiste, as well as by his old steward Lucien, whose occupations out of doors were gone, now that his master had no more seignorial rights to be claimed, and no more rents to receive. Lucien's opinion of M. Durand, who had always been his enemy, might have conveyed him quickly enough to prison if he had expressed it openly.

There had been some question of the Vicomte and his family joining his father at Mercy-le-Roy. But on

the whole it seemed safer and wiser for them to remain where they were: the peasants about Mercy-le-Comte seemed well disposed; there had been no disturbance; the old Curé, when dismissed like his brother in the town, had been quietly allowed to take refuge at the château, where Madame de Mercy was only too glad to receive him as her chaplain; and there was a shade of safety in being a few miles distant from M. Durand, who was regarded, justly or unjustly, as the firebrand of the district. They all knew, without saying it — even Bernard, in his charity, with his advanced views and his love for the people — knew very well that Durand was only lying in wait for some false step on his part or his father's, to denounce and to ruin the whole family.

It was in this atmosphere of storm, of doubt, of suspicion, that Betty and Constantine grew out of childhood, and not altogether unhappily; for the private life of houses like M. Durand's was very little affected by all these earlier events of the Revolution. M. Durand said sometimes that Constantine must be enrolled in the National Guard and help to defend the country which sheltered him; but his wife interfered and said that the boy was too young; only just sixteen, and small and delicate for his age. It was credit enough for the household, at present, that Camille should strut about in uniform, and compose and play patriot music on his violin. The *Marseillaise*, with variations, very soon became the favourite air at Mercy.

During these three years, Betty by no means forgot

her friends at either château. She and Constantine paid the Comte no more visits, for they found that nothing displeased the Durand family so much; but they saw him now and then in the early part of the time; and more than once Madame de Mercy, driving into the little town, or returning from a visit to her father-in-law, smiled and waved a kind hand from the window of her coach to the English girl and boy, if she happened to pass them in the square. This also was before the state of the country made people unwilling to drive about the roads at all, and before the gentry were in fact, though not in name, prisoners in their own houses.

In the early autumn of 1792 France was at war with almost the whole of Europe, though not yet with England; bad weather and heavy taxes had almost caused a famine, and this made people all the more ready to catch wildly at any apparent means of bettering the state of things. In August the King and the royal family were imprisoned: the first days of September saw that massacre of innocent people in the prisons of Paris, which was one of the blackest crimes of the Revolution. These events had much to do with the first rising of Royalists in La Vendée, which, checked for the time, burst out in the following spring into real war. Soon after this the National Convention proclaimed a republic, declaring that monarchy in France was at an end for ever. About this time also, all decent society in France was crippled by the police law, which invited every citizen to denounce conspirators and

suspected persons, and ordered all municipal bodies to search out crimes against the safety of the State, and take the accused into custody. This was soon followed by the establishment of revolutionary committees in every town. The worst, the most irreligious and discontented characters were thus placed in authority over all who were respectable according to an older fashion.

M. Durand's moment was now come. He, as Mayor, was absolute in his little town of Mercy. As head of the Committee, his power extended over all the district for many miles round: and he had a worthy lieutenant in the blacksmith, Poulain, the same man who, three years before, had cast suspicious looks at the English children and muttered that they were spies.

CHAPTER X.

CITIZENS IN A GARDEN.

"Life is not quite over,
Even if the year has done with corn and clover,
With flowers and leaves; besides, in fact it's true,
Some leaves remain and some flowers too,
For me and you."

The old garden of the Maison Verte looked as peaceful, that October afternoon, as if there was no such thing in the world as war, suspicion, denunciation, violence. All the household was resting after the labours of the vintage; the sun was shining quietly over the long grass and the reddened, gilded trees. On a stone bench near the entrance of the alley of limes, up and down which she no longer raced with her brother, being grown up and dignified, sat Miss Betty Maynard, with a piece of fine needlework in her hands. Her brother lay full length at her feet, deep in a book, as usual. At sixteen, he still looked almost a child; he was still slight and pale, and his eyes were dreamy; yet, though a young student in all his ways, he was a fearless and high-spirited boy, and Betty, though a stronger character, knew that she would never under any circumstances be ashamed of her brother. The

motherly feeling she had always had for Con was strengthened, now that she felt so much older than he was, so much older than in reality. When she saw him in any danger of listening with enthusiasm to the nonsense talked by Camille, she gave him her mind in plain English. This was necessary now and then, for the words "Liberty, equality, fraternity" had then, and always will have, a fascination for young and generous hearts which have not the patience to enquire what they really mean, and how they may be practically worked out for the good of everybody.

Camille Durand, now a tall young fellow of twenty-one, growing broad and strong, dressed in the uniform of the National Guard, his red locks flattened down and tied in a bob like his father's, came striding through the grass and along the mossy path where Betty was sitting.

"Good evening, citizens," he said, with a smile and a salute.

Constantine lifted his head and laughed. Betty frowned and bent over her work: she was too English to regard this new style of address, which had been ordered by the Paris authorities a few days before, as anything but painfully ridiculous.

"You do not like to be called *citoyenne*, Miss Betty?" said Camille, smiling still, but with a little anxiety.

"No, Monsieur Camille," Betty answered, shortly and scornfully.

"But you must not be angry with me. That would be unfair, because I am only carrying out the orders of the government."

"I think your government is very silly," replied the girl, without lifting her head.

"Do not say that in my father's hearing," murmured the young man.

He stood near them, watching Betty a little wistfully, waiting, as it seemed, for a kind word or look which he was not likely to receive, for Betty's work absorbed all her attention. There was silence, except that the leaves rustled overhead, and the distant sounds from the square spoke of market-day, the one busy day in the week at Mercy.

"What do you want, Camille? Have you anything to tell us?" Constantine said presently, finding his studies disturbed by the presence of the young republican.

"Perhaps I have, my child; who knows! One little piece of news which will amuse Miss Betty," said Camille, in an odd voice; and there was something strange in his manner, something eager and yet restrained, which made Betty look up in spite of herself. She could never be unjust enough really to dislike Camille, though he worried her a good deal sometimes.

"What is it? What do you mean?" she said.

He gave her one quick glance, a curious one, and then looked on the ground and said, smiling, "They have changed the name of our town. It is to be Mercy-la-Nation, not Mercy-le-Roy any longer. And Mercy-le-Comte is to be Mercy-Citoyen."

"*Merci, citoyen!* *Merci* for your interesting news!"

cried Constantine, bursting into a fit of merry laughter, while his sister's lips curled more scornfully than ever.

"How absurd you are, Con!" she said. "What will they do next!"

Camille had joined in the boy's laugh; but he now became suddenly grave and said, "Ah! if one could answer that question! But never mind, all is for the best in the end. We must have a clean sweep of everything that is old, before our new world can really come into being. Indeed, Miss Betty, you must remember that no great work was ever done without enthusiasm, and that may sometimes mean a little foolishness. You must confess that, though you find it difficult to understand the spirit of our nation. I had something much more serious to say, however. Will you allow me to sit down on this bench?"

"Certainly," said Betty.

"I will now give you this letter," he said, "on the condition that you will tell me what is in it."

He sat down beside her, and drew a folded paper from an inner pocket in his uniform.

"A letter for me!" said Betty. "Who is it from? Why did not you give it me at once, M. Camille?"

She spoke gently enough, but there was a certain sternness in her voice and look which brought the colour into the young man's face. Looking at her earnestly, almost entreatingly, he held the letter in his hand and did not put it into hers, which she stretched out to receive it.

"My condition?" he said.

"Condition! I do not know what you mean," said Betty indignantly, and her eyes flashed. "If that letter is for me, it is mine, and why should I tell you or anybody what is in it! — Give me my letter," she added in a tone of command, as he still held it just out of her reach.

"You do not understand," he said. "It is my duty, and for your own good, citoyenne. I believe the letter is from her who was formerly called Vicomtesse de Mercy. I have seen her writing before. Therefore, you see, I might very well have read the letter and even confiscated it, instead of stealing it for you. I have put myself in danger by doing this, therefore you will trust me."

"You will leave that to me," said Betty. "Give me the letter, Monsieur Camille."

The young man still hesitated. Constantine shut his book and rose to his feet, standing in front of the others and watching this little scene curiously.

"You may as well do as Betty tells you," he said. "How did you get the letter, may one ask? Who did you steal it from?"

"From my father and the Committee," Camille answered under his breath, and he glanced cautiously round to see that no one was hidden behind the row of clipped limes. "I saw a fellow slinking into the town with a market-basket full of apples on his arm. He was dressed like a peasant, but I knew his face; it was one of the grooms from Mercy-le-Comte — Mercy-Citoyen, I mean. I was waiting in front of the Golden

Lion with my eyes open, for treason is often abroad on market-day. I went a few yards down the avenue and met him. I showed him my pistols, and he let me search his basket, his teeth chattering all the time. Under the apples I found a packet addressed to the old citizen Mercy here—"

"M. le Comte!" said Betty; but Camille took no notice of this interruption. "My father had told me," he went on, "that in view of the plots against the Republic which are hatching all round us, there was to be no private communication between the two houses. So I told the fellow he might do as he pleased with his apples — they were of no use to me — but that the rest of his cargo would be supervised by the Mayor before it was forwarded to the château. I took the packet into the Golden Lion, thinking that my father and the Committee were sitting there, but I found that they were gone out to investigate a case of complaint against the late Curé. So I opened the packet, just to see what it contained, and besides a thick letter for the citizen Mercy, there fell out this letter for you, Miss Betty, which was to be forwarded to you, no doubt, from the château. I put it in my pocket, tied up the rest again, and waited till my father came in. I did not wish you to be compromised, you see."

"Thank you; but I wish you had not behaved dishonourably on my account," said Betty, coldly, her eyes still fixed on the letter.

Camille shrugged his shoulders.

"My father praised me for capturing the packet,"

he said. "It was a letter from Bernard Mercy to his father, inviting him to join them as soon as possible with a view to escaping to England. He and his wife, he said, would probably remain at Mercy, but the impatience of young Louis became every day more dangerous: only yesterday he knocked a man down for not bowing to him, and he would ruin the whole family very soon. He was willing to emigrate, if possible, with his grandfather and his sisters. Ways and means must be talked over; for this, and also as a more convenient place to get away from, the old citizen Mercy was invited to his son's house. They thought that no difficulty would be made as to his leaving Mercy; they advised him to order his coach and drive out openly. My father laughed and said, 'Very well: now we have caught the whole family.' He said that the château here, well guarded, would make an excellent prison for the present, and that young Louis could fight his family portraits, if he must fight somebody. Now you know all, Citoyenne Betty. You see that I am almost committing treason in letting you have this letter, and that it is quite impossible, without a promise that I shall know its contents. I want to save you from being connected with the villanous plots of these aristocrats, and yet I want to save my own honour too. Dear Betty, do you not know me well enough to trust me? Constantine, tell your sister that I am asking nothing unreasonable. I might have read the letter and destroyed it. I almost wish now that I had."

Betty shaded her eyes with her hand: she seemed to be thinking for a moment.

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had," said Constantine.

"But surely you know enough!" said Betty, suddenly lifting her head. "You say that the family is ruined and is going to prison, and you are proud of the noble action of betraying them to their enemies. This letter can do nothing but give you perhaps some little extra complaint against Madame la Vicomtesse. No: you shall do one of two things. Either give me my letter at once, without any condition, or else read it, and then destroy it or publish it or anything you please; but I will not have it, and I will never of my own free will speak to you again, and I will think of you all my life as a dishonourable coward."

Camille flushed crimson, and there was a strange expression in his eyes as he looked at Betty. Her brown eyes met his fearlessly; the hard resolution in them, and about her firmly set mouth, seemed to show that any further argument was useless.

"Promise me, then" — he said.

"I will promise you nothing."

He rose from his seat, handed her the letter with a bow and a flourish of his hat, and walked away without another word.

Constantine sprang to Betty's side, slipped his arm round her waist, and read Madame de Mercy's letter over her shoulder.

"Mademoiselle: I have no hesitation in writing to you, feeling sure of your kind and affectionate remembrance and of your sympathy in our troubles, caused by

the state of our unhappy country. We have been most unwilling to enter into any plan for leaving it till now, when it seems that the old and the young would be better in a safer place. In planning the emigration of part of our family to England, I think of you and your brother. It is only too likely that France will soon declare war against England, in which case your position at Mercy will become unpleasant and dangerous. It seems strange that your English relations should not have thought of this. In the meanwhile, dear Betty, if I may once more call you so, will you join us here and share in my children's chances of safety? We hope that my father-in-law will be able to drive out of Mercy without interruption, on a visit to us. If you and your brother can join him, will you manage to communicate with him privately on the subject? I think, in fact I am sure, that there are still people left in Mercy-le-Roy who may be trusted; but for your own sake burn this letter, and carry out the plan, if it seems to you possible, with the greatest care and secrecy. M. Durand might imagine that I am trying to kidnap you, but I need not assure you that your own safety is what I have at heart. Receive the assurance of my continued affection.

"M. Mercy."

"Oh, Con, what shall we do!" cried Betty, letting the letter fall and lifting both her hands to her head with a gesture of despair. "It is all known, they are lost, they are ruined. We cannot even save them. Oh, my dear Vicomtesse!"

The strong-minded Betty hid her face in her hands

and rocked herself to and fro. She was not given to hopelessness, but she knew how the spirit of the time was against these unfortunate nobles, and she understood M. Durand.

"You and I have had a narrow escape, Con," she said. "Camille is odious — and yet, if he had left this letter with the others — "

"Don't talk about us now," said the boy, frowning with eagerness. "We must do something, Betty. Set your wits to work, and let us plan the best thing to do. They do not know yet that the letters have gone wrong, and so they will wait for answers and be taken by surprise. Don't you think that if we were very quick, we might let them all know in time to slip off to the coast to-night? You see, their only chance is to be quick. Betty, Betty, do you see?"

He seized Betty by the shoulder, and shook her impatiently. "Think, Betty; think what we shall do, and be quick about it."

She looked up in his face, and just then seemed to have lost courage, as well as hope.

"But the risk, dear!" she murmured. "If it was only myself, of course I shouldn't care — I would do anything. But how can I let you run into such awful danger!"

"Do you take me for a coward, a dishonourable coward? By the by, Betty, you should not say such hard things to Camille. He would be friendly if you would let him."

"Too friendly: I don't want his friendliness."

"Well, don't look so red and angry — I didn't mean to vex you. And listen to me — Madame la Vicomtesse is right; France will not be a good place for us if there is war with England, and we may not have another chance of escaping. What do you say? Uncle Julius will send for us? No, Betty, he won't; he will never send for us. Now, not another word about danger. Pluck up your courage, Betty; remember we are English, and much cleverer and stronger and braver than all these French fellows with their babyish chatter. Come, I've made my plan already, how to slip into the castle and tell Monsieur le Comte. I can climb the great chestnut-tree and drop over the wall. As for you — can't you dress up in Adrienne's clothes and get one of the old market-women to take you out of the town in her cart, and just wait at the end of the avenue till I bring the Comte to you, round by the park and the vineyards? I will get old Lucien and Baptiste to come too, and to bring a horse if possible. It will be dusk; we shall manage it easily. There is an old woman who comes from Mercy-le-Comte and loves them all, I know; she told me one day how good they had been to her son when he was ill."

"Yes, I know. Mother Picot, they call her. But Con, these people will miss us, and hunt for us everywhere."

"All the more reason to be quick. They are all thinking of other things this afternoon; they will not miss us till the supper-bell rings at six, and it is not

much after three now: I heard the church clock strike. And Betty, if I can get the Comte away at once, and if he can walk so far, I shall take him beyond the end of the avenue, to where those four roads meet a mile further on."

"Where the old gibbet is and the horses always shy?"

"Yes. If we can smuggle a horse out, we may push on to Mercy-le-Comte straight, so don't wait for us long. Good-bye, Betty; I must lose no time. As for you, there is no such hurry; only go into the house soon, for fear Camille should come back and ask where I am. What have you done with the letter? There, hide it, and burn it as soon as you can."

"Con, my dearest," cried the girl, "kiss me before you go."

He laughed and gave her a rough hug. "Why, you are like a French person!" he said half indignantly, and was gone.

Betty sat still for a few minutes, feeling as if she was in some terrible dream. A very blackness of darkness seemed to surround her and weigh upon her. She could not hold her boy back, or do anything but admire the fine spirit which flushed his cheeks and shone in his dark eyes. She sympathised with all her heart in his knight-errantry, in the light, careless heroism, strengthened by manly forethought, with which he threw himself into this duty of helping those who had been kind to him and herself, and were now so unjustly persecuted. She had not spent these years in France

without guessing what was likely to be the fate of these *ci-devants*, as they called them, now that their intention to emigrate was known to the Revolutionary Committee; and she knew Constantine was right in saying that quick action was the only chance. For the sake of the De Mercys, to save time, they would have been more safely warned by letter; but this seemed impossible. Older heads might easily have thought out some better plan than Constantine's, which with the disappearance of the brother and sister was sure to rouse suspicion instantly. Betty felt this more strongly every moment after her brother was gone, and when it was too late to make any change. She went into the house presently, quite determined to carry out her share of the scheme, but yet oppressed with an almost certainty of failure, and a loneliness such as she had never felt before. "I was separated from Con," she said long afterwards, "and it seemed as if death must be the next thing."

CHAPTER XI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"Young gentleman, your spirits are too bold for your years."

Constantine put on the red cap which M. Durand had given him early in that year, and which Betty hated so much that she had several times threatened to burn it. He ascertained that the courtyard was empty, and that no curious eyes were peeping from the windows, for Madame Durand and her servants were either asleep or out in the market, and the men of the house were away at the Golden Lion, where the Committee was arranging what steps to take in consequence of the intercepted letters.

They were taking time to consider this, not being quite unanimous, for the hasty zeal of Citizen Poulain had to be moderated by the cooler counsels of Citizen Durand and other worthies, who felt a comfortable certainty that the whole Mercy family was caught in a trap. Its younger branch would wait a few days, at least, for an answer from the grandfather to the letters he would never receive. M. Durand had made quite certain of this by quietly laying hands on the pretended peasant with his basket of apples, and put-

ting him in the lock-up for carrying treasonable correspondence; it would not do to let him return to Mercy-le-Comte with the news of what had happened to him.

Before his arrest, however, unknown to Durand, the groom had had a few words with Lucien the steward at the castle gate, and though he did not know the contents of the letters, had described how Camille Durand had robbed him of them. This was enough to send old Lucien hurrying to his master with the news that danger was abroad.

Constantine strolled easily into the market with his hands in his pockets, and lingered for a few minutes among the stalls, some of which were planted right against the great rugged wall of the château. There had originally been a ditch here, but during the last peaceable century it had been filled up, and the white cobbly pavement of the square, over which the country-folks' *sabots* clattered, ran up right to the foot of the wall. A few trees which had been planted there sheltered stone seats where the young and old of Mercy reposed or played in the shade on summer days. One great chestnut-tree, now thick with golden leaves, leaned against the castle wall and overtopped it, so that venturesome boys could climb to the rampart and sit there hidden by leaves, watching what went on in the outer court of the castle. Lucien had often advised the Comte to have this tree cut down, but he would not consent. Under its shade, on market-days, a travelling cutler generally set out his wares; a cheerful dark-faced

man with earrings, who came from the south, Madame Durand's country, but resembled her in nothing else, being a general favourite for his good nature and liberality. He smiled on the English boy, whom all the people liked for his pretty face and good manners, and was quite willing to sell him a strong knife for gardening; Constantine having bethought himself that it might be as well not to go quite unarmed, and luckily having a few francs in his pocket. Then other customers came up to Remy the Gascon, and while he was attending to them, Constantine slipped round behind his booth into the deep shadow, and began at once to climb the tree.

One of these other customers was actually the wife of Poulain, a woman as violent as her husband; she began to tell the cutler triumphantly how those vermin, the aristocrats, were trapped at last.

"Ah, one of these days," she said, "we shall see those great walls torn down and all the ill-gotten riches plundered. I have been expecting it ever since the day of the Bastille, but we do things slowly in these parts, Citizen Remy. In the south you are quicker about digging rats out of their holes."

"All right, Citoyenne Poulain," laughed the cutler, showing his white teeth. "I shall only be sorry because of my old chestnut-tree here, which has sheltered me from rain and sun on so many market-days. If you can let that stand, do, for my sake, even though it was planted by some rogue of a *ci-devant*."

As Remy spoke, he looked up at the tree, and was

startled by seeing the English boy's face on a level with the lower branches, peering down at him through the leaves. Certainly Remy's instincts were good, and he acted the part that day of Constantine's guardian angel; for he came at once to two conclusions: — one, that the boy was in league with these unfortunate aristocrats, to whom in his heart he wished no harm; the other, that the boy's doings were no business of his, and certainly not of Citoyenne Poulain's, who would be capable of raising a riot in the square and storming the château on the instant. To keep her eyes and thoughts occupied, that she might neither see nor hear what was going on among the boughs above her head, became at once Remy's benevolent object. He brought forward a new invention in the way of candle-snuffers, and described its merits in a loud voice and in the lively style of his native province, till the people round began to laugh, and Mother Poulain pulled out her purse rather grudgingly.

"Ah, citoyenne, I knew you would appreciate it," said Remy the Gascon. "I don't take the trouble of showing my last new wares to ordinary people. I always find it takes genius to understand a novel idea. Why, I should have to beat most people on the head with my snuffers to make them see their peculiar merit, while you, citoyenne" —

"Ah, flatterer, you make a fool of everybody with that southern tongue of yours," said the dame; but she was not displeased: she paid for the improved snuffers and took them away with her.

In the meanwhile Constantine gained the top of the wall without difficulty, and with the help of projecting stones, at the cost of some injury to his hands and clothes, let himself down to the roof of some low-tiled sheds which he did not know were dog-kennels, till several large dogs rushed out barking fiercely to the length of their chains. It took a long jump and an active pair of legs to be rid of them. Their barking brought the Comte's old coachman, and the couple of grooms who remained with him, out of the stables on the other side of the large courtyard. They saw a boy in a red cap running as fast as he could to the second gate, which stood open, and from which a broad space of white paving-stones led on to a stately double flight of steps, the approach from outside to the great hall. The coachman, though old and fat, was beginning to run after the boy, but one of the grooms said he knew him by sight; it was the young English gentleman from Durand's: and then the coachman remembered how he had himself driven his master from Mercy-le-Comte that day, more than three years ago, when he brought the two young strangers to the Maison Verte. So, as it seemed likely that the boy was after no harm, the men went back into the stable to their work of grooming the four fat horses, all that were left; Lucien having warned them that the coach might be wanted that evening or to-morrow.

"Our master may drive out, but Durand will turn him back again," said one of the grooms, despondingly.

"Never mind, Jacques: your duty is to be ready, no

matter what else happens," said old Henri, the coachman. "There, don't leave Black Roland yet; he is not fit to be seen."

Henri found that discipline was sadly relaxed in these days, even within the walls of his coach houses and stables.

Constantine was conscious of being seen from different quarters: a porter looked out of his room in the second gateway; a cook, with a white cap on, poked his head out of the low arched door of a kitchen. Both these called out to know what the intruder wanted: but he ran on, up the broad white steps, straight in to the dim and stately silence of the great hall with its marble floor, high windows, and stairs leading to galleries at each end. It looked very cold and uninhabited; no more grand banquets and balls and receptions were held there now; the gilded and yellow satin furniture stood about drearily on the shining, ice-like floor. There were several doors, all shut, and over them rows of portraits looked sternly down at the strange boy with his red cap, venturing so boldly into their ancient seclusion. As Constantine hesitated a moment, not knowing which way to go, and realising that among the old halls and corridors it might be difficult to find M. de Mercy, he noticed that the two ends of the hall were hung with tapestry, which at the northern end moved a little in one place as if there might be an opening behind it. Then he heard the clink of metal, and then a voice which he felt sure was the Comte's, though he could not hear any

words. Walking lightly that way, he saw that in fact a square of tapestry was detached from the rest, with a door behind it evidently standing ajar, for a yellow gleam of light shone through. If the door had been shut, the hangings, falling into their place according to the pattern, and in a dark corner under the gallery, would have completely hidden its existence. As it was, Constantine found the latch in an instant and pulled it open. He found himself at the foot of three or four stone steps, leading to another door which stood wide open, within which was a narrow chamber in the thickness of the wall. He saw the dark figures of two or three men, starting up violently at the sound of his entrance. The light of a lamp fell on shelves in the opposite wall, loaded with magnificent gold and silver plate which flashed before his eyes and dazzled them. As the light caught his red cap in the doorway, he met with a reception he had not at all expected. The Comte's voice, trembling with rage, cried out — "Here they are, the robbers and murderers! I will not submit tamely to tyranny like this: your wicked laws are nothing to me. Give me the pistol, Baptiste. Bear witness: I mean to sell my life and treasure dearly: I fire!"

A loud explosion and a flash; a pistol bullet whizzing close by Constantine's ear, so close that his red cap fell off his head. The solid door behind him was splintered; but after the first moment's shock he knew that he was unhurt, and in the blinding smoke he sprang up the steps and fell on one knee before the Comte, kissing

the trembling hands from which the pistol fell with a heavy clank on the floor.

"In heaven's name, what is this?" stammered the old man, frowning, and laying his hand on the boy's dark curls. "What brings you here? Where is the other man — the red-capped fellow — have I killed him?"

"I was the red-capped fellow, Monsieur le Comte," said Constantine.

He went on to tell the Comte, in a very hurried fashion, of the letter that Betty had received from his daughter-in-law, and also what he had heard from Camille of the contents of the other letters.

"Ah, then poor Nicolas had something important in that basket of his," muttered old Lucien the steward, as he went on packing piece after piece of the splendid plate into a large oak chest bound with iron, which stood on the floor. "No wonder they locked him up! Yes, it will be the best way, as this young gentleman says, to get M. le Comte away from this robbers' den as soon as possible. It will be a difficult business, however, and the more quietly it is carried out the better."

Then all the men listened while Constantine told the details of his plan. There were more of them now, for the cook and the porter and two or three others had rushed into the hall at the sound of the pistol-shot, which Henri and the grooms were too far off to hear. All seemed to agree that the Comte must leave the castle secretly and at once; but to Con, as he waited for all the necessary arrangements to be made, the

delays caused by one and another seemed absolutely endless. Baptiste, the faithful valet, had to pack a change of linen and some other necessaries for his master in a knapsack to be carried on his shoulders — for of course the Comte could not go without him; and then the Comte had to change his clothes to a plain travelling suit, and to muffle himself in a large cloak, so as to avoid instant recognition by any one who might happen to meet him outside his own walls. Then Henri had to be sent for, and received orders to send the most active of the grooms and the best of the horses to a lower gate of the gardens, where they opened into the road leading to the eastern gate of the park; this, though in a contrary direction to Mercy-le-Comte, seemed the safest way of escape; once out of the park, it would be easy to strike into lonely country by unfrequented paths, and so sweep round to the left towards the cross roads that Constantine had mentioned to Betty as a meeting-place.

Perhaps Constantine in his young enthusiasm was slightly disappointed at finding that he would by no means have sole charge of the old man to whom he was so truly devoted, and for whose sake he had already so narrowly risked being shot through the head. It seemed indeed, during that painful and anxious time of waiting, while he could hardly stand still in the hall for burning impatience, as if he was forgotten and set aside among these talking, bustling servants, in whose hands the old Comte, crushed by misfortune, seemed now almost a helpless child. But at last, after a long

time, M. de Mercy came from an inner door, wrapped up and ready to travel, nervously striking his cane on the slippery marble floor.

"Give me your arm, my boy," he said to Constantine. "When we met first, we little thought that this would be your mission, to lead a poor old man for the last time from the house of his fathers. I hope I am not selfish in taking you with me, but truly I do not think there is safety for you in Mercy."

"Betty is gone, monsieur, and so I could not stay," the boy answered simply.

The Comte led him out at the back of the hall, through a long passage into the beautiful Louis-Quinze room where he had entertained the children long ago, and through this to the terrace, from which the orange-trees in their boxes had already been removed to the great glass house where they lived in winter. The afternoon had waned by this time, the sun was low, and the two upper terraces lay in shadow, while the tall cypresses stood stiff and dark against clouds of rose-flushed grey. The white statues looked cold and shivery; the garden below was a wilderness of dead leaves, for there were not servants enough left to keep it in order. Silence, and a vague sense of danger, seemed to weigh on all the atmosphere of the great house and its surroundings; the only sound was the impatient barking and crying of dogs shut up — poor Cri-cri and Coco, hearing their master's step on the terrace, and quite sure that he could not take his afternoon walk without them.

Constantine looked round anxiously for Baptiste, and concluded, not seeing him, that he would join them with the horse and groom at the gate. Then he was puzzled by hearing voices of men on the lower terrace, and a little surprised that the Comte, walking with difficulty, led him down the steps in their direction. He soon saw that at the far end of the second terrace there was a little white marble temple with coloured glass windows, enshrining a bust of Louis XIV. Several slabs of the floor had been taken up, and there were Lucien, Baptiste, and two or three other men, busied in lowering the great chest they had filled with gold and silver plate into a deep hole in the ground.

"This is the third chest," said M. de Mercy, as he took Constantine to the entrance of the little building and made him look down into the hiding-place. "It is not the first time that the treasures of Mercy have been hidden here; the *cache* is a very old one, and larger than it looks. It was my grandfather's thought to build a temple over it, and it is protected, you see, by the portrait of our great King, which was given to my grandfather by His Majesty's self. Look, Constantine. It may be well, in years to come, that you should share our secret with these few faithful friends who know it already. I do not care to think that my plate may be melted down for the service of the Republic. Who knows! it may escape once more."

"Monsieur need not disturb himself," said old Lucien. "I shall lay the slabs in place myself, and there will

not be a sign of disturbance. When M. le Comte returns to Mercy, he will find all as he leaves it now."

"And God grant that I may find my old friends watching over it," said the Comte. "But come, adieu to you, my faithful servants. My young guide's eyes are impatient, and he is right: we must go on our way. Are you ready, Baptiste? that is well. Adieu, adieu, Lucien, Henri, old friends all."

The men had lowered the chest; they left the hole yawning open, and came one after another to kiss their master's hand and bid him farewell. Baptiste, a tall and sturdy fellow, fell on the necks of his old companions, one after another, and kissed them on both cheeks heartily. He then threw the valise over his shoulder, caught up a stout stick, pulled a pair of pistols out of his pockets and thrust them back again, and was ready to follow the Comte, who still leaned on Constantine's arm.

"Adieu, my little English gentleman," were the old steward's parting words to Con. "Take care of M. le Comte, or you will hear of it from me if we ever meet again."

The boy nodded and smiled. "You may trust him as I do, Lucien, and that is entirely," said M. de Mercy; and with one glance back at his old familiar walks, at the shadowy, stately front of the house which had belonged to his name for centuries, he took his hand from the boy's arm and laid it affectionately on his shoulder.

"I am stronger now," he said. "Lead on, my little

friend: if your bright young wits can save me and my poor fortunes, why, my children will thank you. For myself life has not much left, so that I do not very greatly care."

After that he was silent. As they went down the winding walks that led to the level of the river and the park, they heard behind them the smothered clank of the men's tools, as they closed the hiding-place and laid down the marble slabs over it. They heard also the despairing cries of Cri-cri and Coco, faint in the distance, but wilder as they knew that the master's steps went farther and farther away. And beyond all that, it seemed to Constantine's quick ears that there was a confused noise in the town: it might be only the market, which sometimes grew a little disorderly towards evening, but he fancied voices shouting with more method than any mere market excitement would possess; and he wondered, turning cold at heart, whether Betty was safe away. The church clock struck five; the sun had already set, and twilight was settling down, earlier in France than he would have expected it in England. Almost unconsciously he quickened his steps, for it seemed to him that as the Comte had decided to escape, the sooner he was out of these dangerous precincts the better. He was vexed, therefore, when at a turn in the path M. de Mercy suddenly stopped, put his hand into his breast pocket, flung his arms into the air with a cry of dismay, and turned round as if he was going back to the château.

Constantine could not help it. At the risk of offend-

ing the dignified old man of whom, after all, he knew so little, he flung himself before him and seized him by the cloak.

"Stop, stop, monsieur!" he cried. "What is it? Where are you going?"

"Is it anything that M. le Comte has forgotten? I will run like the wind," said Baptiste.

"Oh, monsieur, don't wait, don't delay! Think of the danger," cried Constantine, but the Comte took no notice of his entreaties.

He shrugged his shoulders, wrung his hands, stamped on the ground, and then suddenly poured out to his valet a string of hurried, confused instructions. He was to go back to the château, to his master's bedroom, and there he was to open the tall ebony cabinet with a little key which the Comte took from a chain round his neck. That was plain sailing enough, so far. But then he was to find and open a secret drawer, and the directions how to do this were long and complicated. In the drawer he would find a miniature in a case, a portrait set in blue enamel and diamonds — "You know, my good fellow. You have seen it — the portrait of Madame la Comtesse. It is my greatest treasure; I would rather die than escape without it. That I could forget it, even in this terrible hurry and confusion, is a disgrace I shall never forgive myself. Alas! a sign of weakness, of second childhood. Go, Baptiste."

The valet bowed, and set off running like the wind, as he had promised, back towards the castle.

"We will go on to the gate," said M. de Mercy, "and wait for him there. Martin and the horse will be there by this time. Make yourself easy, my friend Constantine: these men know every path in the country, and the darker it grows the more safely we shall travel." Then he laughed sadly. "If my father could see me, escaping from his house like a thief! Half a dozen years ago even, I should have said that the man who foretold such a thing ought to be whipped round the town as a liar and a false prophet."

Constantine did not know what to say. He began to think that with all these delays there would be no escaping at all, but it seemed useless to worry the Comte by telling him so. They walked on almost in silence to the gate, a small gate in a dark and hidden corner of the gardens, opening on a road which led from the stables, within the castle walls, down to the eastern gate of the park. No Martin, no horse, was waiting for them there.

"He will be here in a moment; he is a faithful fellow, and old Henri will see to it," said the Comte.

But moments and moments went by as they stood at the gate, while the twilight deepened, listening for the sound of a horse's feet that never came. Only, in the distance, Constantine still fancied that he could hear a roaring like the roaring of the sea, or of a great crowd of people. He asked the Comte if he heard anything; but no, the old man's ears were dim. He heard nothing, he said, not even Baptiste returning; and surely he ought to be here now. Once, when the

waiting time began to seem endless, the boy suggested their going on into the park, and waiting again, if it was necessary, at the lower gate, where Baptiste and Martin would no doubt follow; but the old man would not hear of this.

"No, no, my child," he said, "we must wait where we are"; and he spoke so decidedly that Constantine could say no more.

Presently the Comte sat down on a stone by the gate, leaning forward, his face half wrapped in his cloak, while Constantine stood near him, with strained ears listening for the footsteps that did not come. There might have been some mistake about the horse, but why, why, did not Baptiste come? And the darkness deepened round them: in this corner shaded by firs and yews, even twilight did not last long. They might have waited half an hour — it seemed more like two hours and a half — when the silence was suddenly broken by the violent clanging of a bell, which made Constantine start, and the Comte spring to his feet like a young man.

"What is it! Oh, monsieur, what is it!" cried the boy.

"It is the alarm bell at the château," said M. de Mercy. "Something has happened. We must go back" —

"Oh no, not back! not back! What will they do at Mercy-le-Comte, if you do not come? Trust yourself to me, dear monsieur — let us at least try to get away. I know the paths — I'll find the way. If we can only

get to the cross-roads, Betty will be waiting for us there."

The Comte stood as if he was turned to stone. Constantine threw himself on his knees before him — "For your children's sake, dear monsieur — for Betty's sake — I promised her we would come!"

"For your sake, my boy — well, take me where you please," said the old man in a low voice of despair; and Constantine, quickly opening the gate, led him down into the long alleys of the park, while the great bell still clanged out its message of terror and alarm, its knell of all the ancient splendours of Mercy-le-Roy.

CHAPTER XII.

BETTY'S ENTERPRISE.

"And then end life when I end loyalty."

As soon as the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Mercy had resolved on sending their children, if possible, to England, and on persuading the old Comte to emigrate also, they began to make all sorts of secret preparations with this end in view. They had still a good many friends in the country; there were many people whose feelings of justice were revolted by the treatment the nobles received after they had willingly given up so much to satisfy the spirit of the time. Even where châteaux were not actually robbed and burnt, the lives of the inhabitants were made a burden to them, and to leave France for safer countries, even without any idea of joining armies against her, was a crime. But it was difficult, at least in the more western provinces of France, and in country districts where the nobles had never used their rights oppressively, to rouse a spirit against them revolutionary enough to satisfy the present government. Everywhere the friends of order were to be found, people who from the beginning only asked for reform, not for revolution. They had no

power, of course — that is to say, no public power — and they dared not raise their voices against Revolutionary Committees who had authority from Paris to arrest them and fling them into prison, and who, being backed by the National Guard, seemed irresistible. But it was not till a year later, when the Terror was in full swing, that France lay quite helpless at the foot of the Revolutionary Government. Till then, till a mere word or look rendered one *suspect* and a likely victim of the guillotine, people escaping from their enemies could find secret friends everywhere; and thus the emigration went on long after the new government had forbidden it. People like the younger De Mercys were too patriotic to dream of leaving France themselves, just as the old Comte was too proud to fear the Revolution, but when it became clear to them that things were growing worse every day, and that the country was unsafe, especially for helpless old people and thoughtless young ones, they had unwillingly begun to consider the question of sending their children away. There were many reasons besides patriotism for their own remaining at Mercy: one was that the departure of the heads of the family meant the confiscation of their estates.

The Vicomte's plan was that his father and his children should drive across country to Bec-sur-mer, and there take ship for England. He had friends at several places on the road who would make no difficulty about letting the coach pass; it was a lonely, unfrequented road, passing through no towns till it

reached the little seaport, where all the oppressed had a most faithful helper in Madame Pommery of the White Horse Inn. Though her sister Adrienne was in the service of such a revolutionary leader as Durand, Madame Pommery went on her way fearlessly and without interruption; she was at present the most popular character in Bec-sur-mer; the Mayor of the place was quite under her thumb, and no extremes in politics were encouraged there. If the many good middle-class people in France who shared Madame Pommery's views had been able to meet and combine, the Terror might never have been. But they were scattered, they were overawed by the noise of the opposite party. "In each town or district," says the great historian Taine, "the aggressive company of unscrupulous fanatics, of resolute adventurers and greedy vagabonds, imposes its dominating will on a majority like a flock of sheep, which, accustomed to the regularity of an old civilisation, dares not trouble order to put an end to disorder, or rise against insurrection."

On that October evening the Vicomtesse de Mercy was sitting in the room occupied by her two girls, now just grown up. Her maid, who had been with her for years and was entirely trusted, was opening cupboards and wardrobes and taking out dresses that Madame might decide which should be packed for the journey. Madame did not seem, however, very deeply interested in the choice: her chief idea was, how few could be taken? Jacqueline thought this a little unreasonable,

as the coach could carry a good amount of luggage, and she had heard that M. le Comte had one or two old friends in London, who would no doubt invite the young ladies and M. Louis to dinners and balls.

"Dinners and balls? Ah, yes!" repeated Madame de Mercy absently, and her eyes wandered from the dresses to the high window beyond, through which she could see that twilight was falling fast over the golden trees of the forest. Then she suddenly rose from her chair. "After all, Jacqueline, there is no great hurry. The start will not be made for three days, I suppose, if so soon; for there must be many arrangements, and we have not yet heard whether my father-in-law consents to go."

"And if M. le Comte does not consent, madame?"

"Then I hardly know what we shall do; for though Madame Bonne, of course, goes with the children, she is useless on a journey — unless Mademoiselle Maynard can take charge of them" —

"Mademoiselle Maynard! The young English lady! But she is not older than our young ladies, madame."

"I suspect she is older in mind, my good Jacqueline. Even as a child, I never saw a stronger or more trustworthy face, and she must now be eighteen."

Jacqueline shook her head, however. "No, no. If M. le Comte does not choose to go, Madame la Vicomtesse must go herself. The young ladies must be properly looked after."

"Jacqueline," said the Vicomtesse rather dreamily, standing in the window, "you will get into trouble one

of these days, my good creature. I have not once heard you call me *citoyenne*, and as for our titles, you seem to forget that they exist no longer."

Jacqueline laughed, and her black eyes twinkled. "Pardon," she said, "what is, is. M. le Curé warned me of the same thing. 'My good Jacqueline,' he said, 'you speak and behave as if your fellow-servants and the villagers of Mercy were all to be trusted.' I said to him, 'M. le Curé, this fine new government cannot alter the birth of M. le Vicomte and Madame la Vicomtesse, any more than they can make you not a priest, or King Louis and Queen Marie Antoinette not King and Queen. I shall not alter my manners and speech to please anybody, unless my life comes to depend upon it. Then, perhaps, Madame la Vicomtesse would forgive my using the word *citoyenne*. She will know it is not meant disrespectfully. But I don't think France is likely to see such extremes as that.' M. le Curé shook his head. 'I would not be too sure, Jacqueline,' he said; and I could not help laughing. Does Madame la Vicomtesse really think that words will become of such importance?"

"I cannot say," said the Vicomtesse. "These people in Paris will have their laws obeyed."

"They will not long persuade France to obey laws that are ridiculous," said Jacqueline, with an air of conviction, as she shook out an evening dress and hung it again in the wardrobe.

"I wonder if Nicolas is come back yet from Mercy-le-Roy," said Madame de Mercy. "Go and ask, Jacque-

line. He was ordered not to stay there, but to bring an answer from my father-in-law as quickly as possible. He certainly should be back by this time."

Jacqueline, as she left the room, muttered some remarks on the slowness and stupidity of Nicolas. "What is the use of being loyal, if one has no brains and not much courage!" she observed to herself. "When I saw him in his stupid little disguise, I thought he would get into some trouble. Now if M. le Vicomte had thought of sending me!"

Madame de Mercy, left alone in the darkening room, lighted a pair of candles on the chimney-piece, and then sat down in a large armchair near the window. Her eyes wandered to the two small, high beds with their long silk curtains, embroidered by herself, with the carved *prie-Dieu* chair near each, and all the various books and possessions of her two girls, who had not long been allowed to sleep alone together here. It was an almost unbearable thought that the room would soon be empty. Only Louis, whose consent seemed necessary, had been taken into his father's and mother's counsels about the proposed emigration: the two young girls were still ignorant, for they were both childish for their age, the elder, Victoire, rather foolish and frivolous, the younger, Marie, delicate and shy; and it seemed best that the matter should be talked of as little as possible till everything was decided. Victoire's excitement and Marie's timidity might easily lead to mischief and danger. The old Curé knew, of course, but Madame Bonne, the girls' old governess, was not a

person of much common sense, and among the servants, only Jacqueline and the steward had as yet been taken into their masters' confidence. Every one knew that if the plan once reached the ears of M. Jean Durand and the Mercy Committee, there was very little chance of its being carried out at all.

The Vicomtesse was little altered since that night when Betty Maynard had her first sight of the French *noblesse*, and found a friend to comfort her in the thunder-storm. She was a beautiful, young-looking woman still, slender and tall, with all the simple, straightforward dignity which had so impressed the English girl from the first moment she saw her. Her delicate features were paler and thinner, and there were new lines on her white brow, but her smile was as sweet as ever, and there were only one or two silver threads in the dark unpowdered hair which still curled softly on her forehead.

She sat there waiting for a long time, so long that the world outside grew quite dark, and the candles burned half-way down in their sockets. Jacqueline did not return. In these disturbed times even the most regular households became disorganised, and Jacqueline, faithful soul as she was, and much as she talked of unchanged respect for her superiors, was not seldom guilty of staying to gossip with the other servants, and forgetting the messages on which she had been sent. So Madame de Mercy waited in vain to hear whether Nicolas and his basket had come back safely from the town. Presently the weary anxiety in her face relaxed

a little: with folded hands, and head laid back on the cushions, she fell quietly asleep. She had lain thus for at least an hour, dreaming happy dreams, if any, for she was smiling in her sleep, when the hurried approach of young feet in the corridor, and then the opening of the door, made her start awake suddenly. Her three children, Louis, Victoire, Marie, came in at once and talking all together.

"Here is mamma at last! We could not find you. Papa wishes to know if you will see a young woman from Mercy-le-Roy, who has brought a message, and will not give it to any one but you. Mamma, we were all out on the terrace with Bonne, when we heard footsteps coming along the path from the forest and on to the bridge. It was too dark to see, and Louis called out, 'Say your name, or I will set the dogs upon you' —and he was going to do it, because there was no answer, but papa called to him from the window" —

"It is so absurd as to be positively maddening!" cried M. Louis, catching his mother's reproachful glance. "Our house is no longer our own. Every passing vagabond is to be allowed to walk in without giving his name or his business. If I had my own way, we should still be masters; as it is, we are slaves."

"My dear son, if you cannot understand the times you live in, at least remember that the house is not yet yours," said Madame de Mercy, gravely. "And where is this young woman, Victoire? It is very likely that she brings a message from your grandfather."

"Why should my grandfather send messages by a peasant girl?" muttered Louis.

"She is outside in the hall, mamma. When she heard papa's voice she came straight in, and did not seem afraid of the dogs at all. We left Bonne in charge of her, and went to papa, and he sent us to you."

"You have never seen her before?"

"I don't know," said Victoire. "Marie thinks she knows her voice. She has a large black cloak on, with the hood pulled over her face."

"Have the kindness, Louis, to ask the good young woman to come to me here," said Madame de Mercy.

The young gentleman obeyed by stalking back into the hall and saying to Madame Bonne, who stood watching the stranger with nervous, curious eyes, "Madame la Vicomtesse is in my sisters' room: she will see the messenger there."

So Betty, completely hidden from head to foot in Adrienne's voluminous cloak, walked after Madame Bonne out of the great hall — where Camille had once played his fiddle for a merry party of ladies and gentlemen to dance, and where the same Louis who had just threatened to set the dogs upon her had offered her his hand — down one or two narrow passages to the room where the Vicomtesse and her daughters were waiting. As she came in Madame de Mercy rose from her chair; then, with a sign of her hand, sent the two girls and their governess out of the room, and then

said, quickly and low, "Throw off that cloak, dear child, and let me embrace you."

"You have had my letter?" she said a moment later, when Betty was seated on a stool at her feet, leaning her dark head against her knees. "But why did you come alone, like this? Where is Constantine? and how did you get here?"

"I could not ask them outside," said Betty, looking up, and not answering any of these questions — "I was sure, because he would have been waiting for me — he has not brought M. le Comte yet?"

"Who? Constantine? Dear Betty, what do you mean? We did not expect my father-in-law to-night. My child, you seem distracted. What has happened? tell me quickly."

She sat quite still; with one hand she smoothed the girl's hair, with the other she clasped one of Betty's hands more and more tightly; and this was her only sign of agitation.

Betty had always a way of beginning at the beginning of things; it was part of her nature to be thorough; and thus her story was rather long, for she began with Camille Durand's arrival in the garden that afternoon, and went on, after describing Constantine's plans and her parting with him, to tell her own adventures; how she had gone to Adrienne's room and taken her large black cloak, leaving a louis-d'or on the window-sill in case she could never return it; then how she had slipped out of the house when nobody was looking, out into the market, keep-

ing in the background so that no one spoke to her, round to where little Mother Picot's donkey-cart stood with her small show of vegetables, walnuts, and apples.

"She had just sold them all when I came," said Betty, "and she was starting off home at once, so I went up and told her I had a message to carry to Mercy-le-Comte, and I said to her — 'Remember Madame's kindness to your poor son, and let me go with you in your little cart, mother.' She is a good old woman; she made no objection, only said she would be glad of a companion on such a lonely way, and so we set off together, and as we drove past the Golden Lion I saw M. Durand standing at the door, but fortunately he took no notice of us. At the end of the avenue I made the little mother wait, for I thought Con might be able to persuade M. le Comte to come away at once. But she was too much frightened to wait long; I think it was then she began to fear that she was doing something dangerous, and might lose her cart and her donkey, as well as the money she had in her pocket. Constantine told me to look out again at the cross-roads — you know, madame — so I tried to make her stop there for a time, but she said it was the most terrible place in the whole road, and that her donkey saw things there we could not see. I made her stand still for a minute, and I got out and went a little way towards the vineyards, to see if they were coming. It was dreadfully dark and still, and it seemed a long way from the town. I thought that if M. le Comte could walk so

far, he certainly could walk no farther, and I was quite determined that the cart should wait for him there. I would not tell Mère Picot why she was to wait, for I thought it would frighten her more, but I did tell her I was expecting a friend to meet us there. Then the poor old woman" — Betty could not help laughing a little — "began to suspect me of being a robber, and of having decoyed her to that dangerous place to rob and murder her with the help of this friend who was coming. I told her I was stronger than she was, and need not wait for anybody, if that was my object. Then she began driving off at once, so I just stopped her and tied her hands with my handkerchief, and stood by the donkey for a long time, while she made such a noise, the silly creature, that I wonder all the wolves and robbers in the forest did not come."

"My dear Betty, that was a strong measure," said the Vicomtesse. "It would have been better to tell the poor old soul the truth."

"I thought of that, but she seemed too foolish. She might have hurried away and spread the news, and M. le Comte might easily have been overtaken. In truth, who knows what has happened now!"

"Well, go on. When your story is finished, I shall be able to think. How long did you wait at the cross-roads? It is not a pleasant place in the twilight."

"A long time. At last I was so tired of her sobs and moans and scoldings that I left the donkey and went again a little way towards the vineyards, thinking they must come by that road if they were coming

at all. And when I was a few yards off I heard Mère Picot crack her whip, and the donkey trotted off as fast as he could go. Then I saw I was left alone. She had been struggling all the time, and at last she had managed to loosen the handkerchief. I ought to have tied it tighter, but I did not wish to hurt the poor old woman."

"Well, and what did you do next?"

"I waited a little while. I sat on the steps of the cross there. Then I thought that they must have gone some other way, and that I was only losing time, and that you ought to know what had happened. So I went on down the road. Once I heard something howling in the wood, and once I thought people were whispering in the bushes quite close to me. But I walked on very quietly: it was just light enough for me to see the road, and as I was wrapped in this cloak, it was difficult for any one to see me. But once I really was frightened. Two National Guards came by on horseback. I was under a large tree, so they saw nothing of me, but I thought perhaps they were looking for Constantine and me. We knew they would find out at six o'clock that we were gone, and they may have found it out earlier. Then I thought it was dangerous to keep to the road, so I turned into a little field with poplars all round it, down by the stream, and then got into the edge of the forest, and presently I saw an open place with a great building, and I knew it must be the château — and so here I am. Will they come here, do you think, to search for me?"

"Not without some superior authority, I hope," said Madame de Mercy. "They will have to go back to M. Durand for that."

"They might have it already," Betty murmured. "However, it does not matter about me. Madame, do you see that there is great danger? If you are going to emigrate, it must be at once, or they will not let you go, and they will perhaps find fault with you for even thinking of it."

"Yes, Betty, I see it all. I hardly know what to think or fear. It is only for the children — and my father-in-law — I would give worlds to know if anything has happened to him. Our messenger that we sent with the letters has never come back. Come to my husband, child: he must hear your story. And my poor Betty, you are starving, I am sure."

That was a strange night, the second night that Betty Maynard spent at the château of Mercy-le-Comte. The Vicomtesse took her straight to her own sitting-room, and calling Jacqueline, gave her orders to bring food and wine without telling the other servants for whom it was wanted. To Betty, in her awful anxiety about Constantine, it seemed impossible to eat, but the Vicomtesse gently insisted, waiting upon her with her own hands. The Vicomte, his wife having sent for him to her room, paced up and down and listened in stern silence to the story He was a good deal changed since Betty had first seen him in his father's house; his shoulders stooped, his hair was grey; the bright confidence of his voice and manner

had disappeared with his hopes of a Golden Age. Or if this last hope still lived — for it lay too deep in generous hearts like his to be killed by the first excesses of the Revolution — the realisation of crimes to be committed in the name of Liberty, of the sea of blood through which France must wade to a perfect equality, was enough to plunge all reasonable Frenchmen in deep depression for the time. No man so thoughtful as Bernard de Mercy could feel or join in extravagant rejoicing at the present state of France, even though all the hated feudal laws and unfair rights were done away, and though he had little or none of the personal pride of men like his father and his own young son.

"Yes, we have little time before us," he said. "You are right, *citoyenne*, and our best thanks are due to you. After this misfortune the difficulty of getting away will be doubled. I suspect, do you know, that my father has decided to stay where he is, and has kept your brother with him. We shall hear something from him in the morning, no doubt."

Betty stared. This explanation had not occurred to her and she did not think it likely. If Constantine had not been occupied with the Comte's escape, he would never have left her to make hers alone. If not in time to join her at M. Durand's, he would certainly have been at the end of the avenue, or at least at the cross-roads. What good could he possibly do the Comte by waiting quietly with him at the château till it pleased M. Durand to make prisoners of them both!

At the wish of the Vicomte, Madame de Mercy called a family council in her room. It consisted of the old Curé, who greeted Betty with fatherly kindness; of Madame Bonne, very fat and nervous; of Louis, who stalked into the room and stood by his mother's chair with haughty eyes cast down; of Robert the steward, and Jacqueline. She came in stifling an unseemly laugh, of which her mistress would have taken no notice at any other time, but she now looked up quickly and said, "What amuses you, Jacqueline?"

The steward glanced at the waiting-woman with stern contempt. She replied by begging madame's pardon, but it was that stupid little Mother Picot.

"What of Mother Picot?" said the Vicomtesse.

"She says that a brigand wrapped in a cloak and disguised as a woman seized her in the market at Mercy and drove her donkey furiously to the cross-roads, and there tied her hands behind her and ordered her to wait till his accomplices came. She knew they must want her bag of money, so she managed to get her hands loose, and the good ass soon showed the brigand a clean pair of heels."

"Who told you this?" said the Vicomte, while Betty blushed crimson, though nobody looked at her.

"Mother Picot herself, monsieur. She came to the gate just now with her son, still trembling with fear. She says she will never go to market alone again."

"What brought her here?"

"She came because the brigand said he had a mes-

sage for the château. Otherwise she would never have taken him into her cart. She repented the moment afterwards, and now her poor old donkey is so exhausted that she says he will never travel to Mercy again. She says it is a serious thing for a poor old woman like her, and Madame la Vicomtesse is always kind."

"Give her that, and tell her to make herself easy: we have no brigands here," said the Vicomte, holding out a gold piece, with which Jacqueline went away to pacify the old woman. "In spite of this," he said, "and though she bears us no ill-will, Mother Picot will spread her story through the village, and set people's ears and tongues wagging faster than they do now. Too true, is it not, M. le Curé? There sits the brigand, who came half-way here in Mother Picot's cart this evening, risking her own safety to bring us serious news, and using strong means to keep Mother Picot a little time on the way, in the hope of meeting my father and bringing him here."

"Ah! Indeed!" exclaimed the old Curé, thoughtfully.

Madame Bonne gave a little scream, and even the dignified Louis raised his blue eyes curiously to the face of the girl he had threatened to set the dogs upon. Betty said nothing. In after days she felt as if it had all been a dream, and sometimes dreamed it again among the scenes of that strange time which often troubled her sleep. The small, high room with its painted ceiling, lit up by the wood fire, little red

flames flickering and dancing in the brass dogs, the gentlemen's sword-hilts and shoe-buckles, Madame de Mercy's diamond earrings and rings. The anxious faces, Jacqueline's bright eyes as she stole back into the room and whispered to Robert a question as to what M. le Vicomte had been saying, to which he only replied by a stern "Silence!"—and Bernard de Mercy's calm voice going on, explaining to these faithful friends the whole state of the case, and asking them to advise the best thing to do. He could hardly bring himself to believe, he said, that it would be dangerous to wait till they heard from his father, who now knew their plans by means of the *citoyenne* Maynard's brother—but he must tell them that the *citoyenne* herself was of a different opinion, and certainly, if any one knew the ways of the Mayor of Mercy and the Committee, it was she.

Then suddenly, just as the Curé was opening his mouth to speak, there came a great noise in the corridor, and several frightened servants rushed into the room. There was a report in the village, they said, that the château at Mercy-le-Roy was on fire. It seemed to Betty that every one screamed together. They wrung their hands and stamped their feet; Madame Bonne and Jacqueline screeched wildly and tore their hair. The only three quiet people were the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Mercy, and Betty herself. She just stepped from her chair, knelt down by the Vicomtesse and took her hand, while Bernard stood like a statue by the chimney-piece. After a moment

he bent over his wife and said in a low voice: "They must start at once, as soon as the coach can be ready. If this report is true, there will be no pursuit: they will all be too busy plundering. And my dear, you must go with them. I must ride at once to Mercy, to see to my father's safety. It is no use our staying here, if such a spirit is abroad. There is a parcel of deeds which I have already given into Louis's charge. Everything else must take its chance — do you see?"

Madame de Mercy turned whiter than before, even to her lips.

"What, I, Bernard? Emigrate without you! Never."

"Magdeleine," he said, sternly but very tenderly, "you will do as your husband commands you."

The room was empty now and quiet, for the whole family and household, including the old Curé, had hurried to the top of the tower, from whence, shining over the woods, they would certainly see the glow of a great fire. Betty was left alone with these two, and all the time that she talked with her husband in low, heart-broken tones, the Vicomtesse held her hand and constantly pressed it.

"And you, mademoiselle," said Bernard suddenly, "I have great confidence in you; in truth, I almost feel that my wife and children are under your care. You will be a guardian angel to them when they arrive in England, for there can be few things more terrible than to land in a strange country with an un-

known language. Your company will be everything to them; will it not, Magdeleine?"

"I cannot go," said Betty, firmly. She dropped her friend's hand and rose to her feet, a tall, upright girl with a certain nobleness of bearing, though her face had no beauty except a pair of good dark eyes.

"Oh, Betty, you must. It is not safe for you here, and M. de Mercy will take care of Constantine," murmured the Vicomtesse.

"Yes, indeed you must," said the Vicomte. "I do not exaggerate the sins of my country — you must know that, if you have heard of me at all — but this is not the right place for you now. As to returning to Durand's, that is impossible. They would not treat you as an Englishwoman, remember, but as a friend of ours. By your generous action of to-day you have put yourself too decidedly on our side. But I must go. I leave it to my wife to persuade you, and I give you my word that your brother's safety shall be as dear to me as if he were my son."

The Vicomte was gone; and for the few minutes that remained before Madame de Mercy had to take her part in the bustle of packing and preparation, she did her best to persuade Betty to join the party in the coach. She explained to her how preparations had already been made all along the route, how Madame Pommery at Bec had promised to see that they were put safely on board an English boat which had conveyed many emigrants before; and therefore that the only difficulty was to get safely and quietly away from

Mercy-le-Comte, which would be managed by avoiding the *diligence* road and driving for the first few miles through the forest, a longer way, but less liable to encounter or pursuit. And then, once at sea, there would not be much more danger, for there was no fear of French ships while France and England were still at peace.

"And your own country, Betty — I thought you loved England and longed to be back!" said the Vicomtesse.

"I do love England — I do long to be back — but not without Con!" said Betty, her voice choked by tears.

"But remember, I have to leave my husband, which seems to me impossible; is it not worse for me than for you? And would not your brother be glad to know of your safety, even if" —

"It is different," said Betty. "Look, madame, I love you, and I would willingly give my life for you: I've thought so ever since that night — you remember — but you will be just as safe without me, and I can't save myself and leave Con here — in the lion's mouth. He is too young, though he is very clever, and my father and mother — I told you once — they both left him in my care. I am not afraid; we are English, and these people will not dare to hurt us. But whatever the danger is, Con and I must be together. Do forgive me!"

The Vicomtesse stooped and kissed the brown head that was once more lying against her knees. "Dear heart! dear brave heart!" she murmured. "Forgive you? I honour you, Betty, and I wish you were my child."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAVALCADE.

"And so our riding and running Avalanche and Hurly-burly has reached the Abyss."

In all the confusion of that night of flight and terror; among all kinds of hasty preparations; hurried attempts to hide what was valuable, in hope of better days; with no time to rest or sleep, except for the two young girls, who knew nothing of their parents' plans and were sent to bed as usual, to be wakened long before daylight by lights flashing in their eyes, and told that they were to be dressed, to drink some coffee and to start off in the coach with their mother; among the frets and difficulties made by Madame Bonne, the frivolities and chatter of Jacqueline, the unreason and ill-temper of Louis, the terrible distractions and anxieties of Madame de Mercy herself, and the thousand little and great matters that had to be decided by the Vicomte, he and his steward being the only persons in the château who appeared quite calm and in their right minds — among all this and a great deal more that can easily be imagined in the sudden breaking up of a large household at a few hours' notice, it was not much wonder if Betty Maynard seemed to be forgotten.

She had no sleep, she had no coffee. In the chilly wintry darkness of that October morning, after helping Jacqueline to roll up a few bundles of necessary clothes to be put into the imperial of the coach, she wrapped herself once more in Adrienne's great cloak and stole downstairs through cold rooms and galleries where neglected lights were flaring. She knew that already the coach was drawn up on the broad terrace inside the moat, where she had first seen the inhabitants of Mercy. She could hear the servants talking as they packed things in, while the horses stamped and rattled their harness. As she passed through a long corridor paved with tiles, glancing now and then from its windows at the moving lights down there, she found herself opposite a half-open door, and heard a low sound of chanting that came from it. It was the chapel, where the old Curé of Mercy-le-Comte was saying a service for his little flock of the château, before they went out into the wide world. A very few figures were kneeling in the dimly lighted space; in front was the Vicomtesse de Mercy with her son by her side: her husband had already gone in search of his father. Betty felt so lonely and sick at heart that she longed to join even in prayers that she could not quite understand: she slipped inside the door and knelt down in the shadow. Before the service was quite ended she slipped away, with equal quietness, and went on her way downstairs, not by the great staircase, but through a door into a turret, from which a flight of steep steps led to another door opening to the east of

the château. Here a foot-bridge over the moat, which she had seen the evening before, led almost immediately into the deep shades of the forest.

Betty lingered a short time on its outskirts, in the shelter of a large oak, whose rough bark felt friendly and English, somehow, as she leaned against it. She had a fancy that she would like to hear the coach drive away; it would be a satisfaction to know that her friends had started safely on their journey, that the warnings she had carried had not been wasted. She was not very happy in her mind, for it seemed to her that all the preparation had grown slower and less energetic, that the servants talked more and did less, and that their faces looked unfriendly, since the Vicomte had ridden away before midnight to join his father. No one could quite make out the truth about the burning of Mercy-le-Roy: news did not travel very quickly or correctly, even for the distance of seven miles; there had certainly been a redness in the sky last night, but not what would have been caused by the blazing of a great castle with all its timbers and floors and costly furniture. It seemed more likely now that the old Comte was shut up in his house, and Constantine with him. This comforted Betty a little, and her one thought and hope was to join them there.

She was sorry to have left Mercy-le-Comte without a final good-bye to her dear Vicomtesse; yet with her affection there was mixed a good deal of English stiffness and shyness, besides a pride which would not let her put herself forward in any way. And she had a

sort of terror of M. Louis de Mercy with his haughty blue eyes, and the straight black brows that had frowned at her so fiercely when she came out of the dark the night before. She could still hear the young, clear, insolent voice threatening to set the dogs upon her — and he had been near his mother all that night, especially since his father rode away. Though Betty did not fear his rudeness now, she shrank from him and only wished to avoid his presence. Wishing him no ill, she perceived even then that such a type as this might very well have been among the causes of the Revolution. He made her understand what Camille had meant when he talked of the unbearable pride of the *noblesse*. She could not wonder at Camille's hatred of a young man like Louis de Mercy, though with her own shrinking dislike there was mingled, half unconsciously, a touch of secret admiration. Princes were like that, Betty supposed; and of course they had a right to be like that, and their subjects no right to be angry.

As Betty lingered there under the oak-tree, she gradually began to know how tired she was, and hungry and cold. The coach did not drive away; the bustle on the terrace went on increasing, and the horses stamped more and more impatiently. Then a muffled figure came out of the arched door, and Madame de Mercy's voice called out, "Has any one seen Mademoiselle Maynard?"

At first there was no answer, then a murmur of "No, madame."

"Ah! then she is gone. We ought to start off as soon as possible. Where is M. Louis? Where are Madame Bonne and the young ladies? There you are!" as more figures came out into the light. "Now where is Louis?"

"M. Louis went to his room for something he had forgotten," answered one of the servants.

"We will get in, my dear Bonne, if you are ready," said the Vicomtesse, and she disappeared into the depths of the great coach.

Then Betty felt that she could wait no longer, for she was aware that the first grey glimmer of dawn was showing itself; the immense outline of the château with its towers was visible against the sky. It was alarming enough to walk alone through that lonely country in the darkness of night; it was worse still in the day, when every creature she met was likely to be an enemy. So she set off, keeping for the first mile in the foot-path along the edge of the forest, startled by the hooting of owls, by the sudden uprousing of hare or rabbit or bird from the grass under her feet. Once some peasants came by, driving their cows to pasture; she hid behind a bush till they were gone. She had planned to reach the road, which ran low in the valley, by a steep little track leading from one part of the forest to another, close by the low meadow, deep and green and wet, surrounded by poplars, where she had left it the evening before; but when she came to this point she was frightened by hearing a noise on the road, the trampling of horses, the tread of a crowd,

the loud talk of a hundred harsh voices, mingled with rough peals of laughter. Though it was almost light enough to see their way, these people were carrying torches and lanterns, which waved and flashed through the trees. Betty, high on the sloping ground above, divided from the road, first by the skirts of the forest, then by a stony bank of heather and occasional fir-trees, then by the tree-shaded meadows and the stream below, was quite safe from this cavalcade and could not even see more of them than their lights and their general movement, though she was near enough to hear the noise they made as they tramped in wooden shoes along the old uneven pavement of the road; the same road from Mercy-le-Roy along which Mother Picot's ass had been so unmercifully driven the night before.

Betty's heart and all her faculties seemed to stand still as she leaned breathlessly against a tree, watching those lights and listening to those footsteps and voices. She knew at once what they meant: the good revolutionists of Mercy-la-Nation, as they called it, having done their work there, were on their way to the sister village and château. They were losing no time: they had found out, or at least guessed, that the family there would escape without delay as soon as they knew of their danger. Now the question was, had the escape been already made? Was the coach safe away, and would these people find nothing but walls to revenge themselves upon? The old Curé, that good, kind old man, what would become of him? Betty had heard him say that he should remain at the château: he was

not afraid, for all the people were his friends, and even the new constitutional priest was on good terms with him. But a mad crowd, like this that was passing now! Betty shivered, remembering stories she had heard of the wreck of châteaux, the fury of mobs, but then remembered that Camille loved his old tutor. She thought Camille, with all his mistaken ideas, was worth something, and had a kind heart under his peculiarities. Thinking of him, Betty found herself smiling a little, even at that moment of great anxiety for her friends. She would not be very much afraid to trust that one revolutionist, she thought; and then there flashed into her mind the knowledge that she had an influence over Camille, if she chose to use it. With her thoughts full of wild, unformed plans, she watched the last straggling lights disappear down the road, and hurried on her way.

Once on the road, she walked very fast and in constant alarm of meeting or being overtaken by somebody. This danger increased with the daylight; and she was not yet very near Mercy-le-Roy, though she had passed the cross-roads, when the sun rose, pale and watery, looking out at first through a veil of raindrops, for a heavy shower had just wetted Betty's cloak and gone flying on towards the east. Then a beautiful rainbow, arching over the golden forest, filled that shivery autumn world with glory. The trees flamed in many colours against the dark sky, over which the rising sun sent sudden rays of light. All the earth was waking. People drove their little carts or brought their cattle

along the road, and Betty was several times delayed in her walk by the necessity she felt of climbing the bank and hiding till they had gone by.

She had decided that first, by some means or other, she must find out if the Comte was still at the château, and Constantine with him; if so, she would try to join them there. If not, she did not know what she must do; but it seemed likely that the wisest plan would be to go to the Maison Verte, where she certainly had two friends, Camille and Adrienne, and perhaps a third in Madame Durand herself: Betty had a real respect for that honest and unattractive person.

She was not very far from the entrance to the avenue, and had planned to turn to the left there and go round by the vineyards, in order not to show herself in the square. She was walking on the margin of the road, which was broad and green, with large walnut and chestnut-trees here and there, when she suddenly stood still and listened. It was a familiar sound of shouting and tramping, and it was following her, though still faint in the distance, along the road. It was coming much faster than she had been able to walk lately, for she was very tired and faint for want of food; besides, her delays had been many. Somehow, the noise seemed greater than it had been two or three hours earlier; the tramp was more measured; the men as they marched were singing the *Marseillaise*. And there were wheels too; yes, a sound of heavy wheels rumbling and jolting over the uneven pavement of the road.

At first Betty hardly understood her own terror. She had felt or fancied herself so sure that Madame de Mercy's coach had had a good start, that it would be driving safely away through the depths of the forest before that mob reached the château. Now, after telling herself that this must be some heavy waggon, it must be the *diligence*, she gradually came to know what her own cold, sick feeling meant, and to know that she had known it all along. It was too late: all those delays had been fatal. The citizen Durand had been right when he exclaimed triumphantly that they were all caught now. All caught; yes, they were all coming — the Vicomtesse de Mercy, her children, her faithful attendants: Betty had tried her best to save them, but in vain.

The sun was shining brightly down the road; there were no lights needed now, as when that cavalcade had started in the dark hours of the morning.

Faster and faster it seemed to come, the victorious little army; another minute, the next turn in the road, would bring it within sight of Betty, as she stood motionless on the wet grass, in the shadow of a walnut-tree. At first she thought it was no use trying to hide herself; why should not she be carried to prison with her friends, as it seemed hardly likely that she would escape it altogether? Then she reflected that if by any possible means she could be of further use to them, it would be while she was free, not a prisoner like themselves; and she also remembered that her first object was to find Constantine, and either to be

imprisoned or to escape with him. Thus liberty seemed worth keeping as long as possible.

Unfortunately, however, the side of the road was here unusually flat and open; there was no bank to climb, and there were no bushes among which to hide; the trunks of the trees, old and large as they were, made a very poor shelter. However, it was that or nothing. Betty ran on to the next walnut-tree, whose great branches, beginning to be bared of leaves, swept down nearer to the ground than the others. She crouched behind the trunk, on the damp carpet of decaying leaves, keeping carefully in the shadow, and hoping that the crowd would be too much occupied with its own triumph to look for more prey along the sides of the road. Then, as the tramp came closer, as the first National Guards came into sight, their muskets and accoutrements flashing in the sun, she forgot herself and her own safety in the painful interest of that spectacle.

The Vicomte de Mercy's four-horse coach, all splashed with mud, its coat-of-arms scratched and defaced, came by at a slow trot. His postilions were riding two of the horses, his coachman, in wig and full livery, but with a red cap on his head, sat on the box with a National Guard beside him. There was also a soldier on each step; the Vicomte's two footmen, hanging on behind, had red caps on their heads and were laughing and joking with the crowd that followed: a crowd of the lowest people in Mercy and the district. Even some of the peasants of Mercy-le-Comte, to their

shame — people who had always met with kindness, instead of oppression, from the family at the château — were waving pikes, scythes, and sickles, and dancing wildly in that crowd. The windows of the coach were pulled up; but through one of them Betty caught a glimpse of a great red face, which looked like that of the blacksmith Poulain. Following the coach, swaying about in the middle of the crowd that jostled it, was a cart drawn by a pair of the Vicomte's horses, and driven by a National Guard. In this sat two women and two men: Jacqueline, white as death and quite silent; beside her a helpless-looking bundle of clothes which Betty guessed to be Madame Bonne; then the old Curé, stooping forward, his face hidden in his hands; and the honest steward Robert, upright as usual, with a look on his set face which boded ill for the revolutionists of Mercy-le-Comte, if he ever had his way with them again. Camille Durand rode by the coach window on a spirited horse which pranced about, made uneasy by the noise of the crowd, and seemed anxious to be free of its rather awkward rider. But the strangest sight of all, which gave Betty a pang of remorse as she remembered her unkind thoughts of Madame de Mercy's son, was that of young Louis de Mercy on another horse behind Camille, led by a National Guard and bound to his saddle, with his hands tied behind his back. His clothes and even his face were splashed all over with mud; he had evidently been pelted by the mob, and some one had thrown a stone which had cut his cheek, so that the blood

trickled in slow drops to his shoulder. A red cap had been put roughly on his head and pulled half over his face; but even in this disgraceful state there was no mistaking him; his eyes, as he stared straight before him, seemed literally to blaze with rage and scorn.

All this passed within a few yards of Betty, as she clung breathless to the trunk of the old walnut-tree; and after the coach and the horsemen there came the straggling crowd with their various weapons, shouting, singing, reviling the aristocrats, rolling irregularly down the road, more dangerous now to any hidden spectator than a few minutes before, when they were keeping step and yelling the *Marseillaise.* Betty almost laughed when at the very tail of the crowd she saw poor little Mother Picot seated in her donkey-cart; the donkey, led by two laughing peasants, pricking its ears and stepping along as if it enjoyed its new and conspicuous position.

At last all seemed safely gone by, and Betty drew a long breath and flattered herself she had not been seen, though she had noticed that Camille, as he passed, was keeping a watch on the sides of the road from which his horse did his best to distract him.

She waited in her hiding-place for some time, till all was quiet on the road, and then ventured forward in the direction of the avenue, being obliged to hide again several times, however, from groups of people who came hurrying along out of the country, eager not to miss the fine doings at Mercy-le-Roy. At last she gladly turned into the lane which led up to M. Durand's

vineyards, and so round to his yards and garden gate, feeling sure that at such a time of excitement she was not likely to meet any of his work-people, and might reach the house and find Adrienne without further trouble.

She was skirting the hedge of a vineyard, which hung straggling over the narrow pathway, and had just stretched out her hand among the briars to take two or three large blackberries which were still to be found there, when a footstep and a shadow made her raise her eyes suddenly. Camille in his stiff uniform, very muddy and very pale, was standing before her in the path. At the first moment, a wolf would have frightened Betty less. Then she remembered Camille's good-nature, his kindness to Con and herself ever since that first meeting in the market-place at Bec-sur-mer, and almost unconsciously she held out her hand to him.

"I am going back, Monsieur Camille," she said. "Did you think I had run away?"

"I know all about it," said Camille.

He took no notice at all of the friendly hand, but looked hard in Betty's face; his eyes were angry, reproachful and sad; they were so strangely expressive that Betty's fell before them.

"How am I to save you now?" he said. "You have broken my confidence, you have cast in your lot with the enemies of the nation, and what is worse, everybody knows it. As you had gone so far, why did you not try to escape with them, or by yourself, which

would have been safer? What brings you back here, where there can be nothing for you but danger?"

"Did you suppose I should try to escape without Constantine?" said Betty, in a colder and prouder tone. "I came back to find him. Where is he?"

"How should I know? Ask your aristocrats," said Camille.

His words carried Betty's confused and wearied thoughts from her brother to her friends.

"Oh, what are you going to do with them?" she said, clasping her hands together. "What an awful, horrible sight — and that poor young man so shockingly used! You knew I was there: you saw me?"

"Yes, I saw you," he said. "I had been watching for you all the way — and I was beginning to hope you had somehow been able to leave the country. And when I saw you hiding there, I felt sure you would not venture through the town, so I came this way on the chance of meeting you."

"But why?" murmured Betty. "What was the use, if you can tell me nothing! Oh, what shall I do!"

He stood silent, looking down. Betty was trembling so that she could hardly stand: her limbs were stiff with cold and fatigue; but she tried hard to collect her ideas and to remember the questions that had been troubling her.

"Camille," she said, more gently, "you see that I am in despair. I think you always meant to be kind to us both, and you know that Con and I cannot live apart. I must find my boy, and if he is in prison, I would

rather be there with him than out here free. Do you really know nothing about him? At least tell me — was the château burnt last night, and what has become of M. de Mercy?"

"Burnt, no," said Camille. "Why should we burn the property of the nation, for it will soon be that! The Committee visited it yesterday, to arrest the old citizen Mercy and to search for treasonable papers. Some of the townspeople got in too, and pulled out furniture and articles of luxury, and made a bonfire in the court. Part of the stables and some straw and hay caught fire, but it was put out before the main buildings were touched. We do things reasonably at Mercy. Besides, there are strong rooms in the château which may serve for prisons, and very appropriately. As for old Mercy, there was no sign of him, and the servants confessed that he had left not long before. Some one saw Constantine running across the court yesterday afternoon: therefore I suppose, wherever the old man is, he may be there too. I did not accuse you, Miss Betty, but I saw that you had made use of my confidence in you — my trusting you with a letter that for every reason I ought to have destroyed — to warn these aristocrats of their danger. Of course I saw it all. You sent Constantine to the old man; you went yourself to the other family. Every one knows that. Plenty of servants and people there saw you; the family talked openly of the warning you had brought them. That poor little Mother Picot, whom you tried to deceive, knows now who

it was that took possession of her donkey-cart. She was puzzled from the first, and suspected something wrong. You led her to believe that you were a brigand — well, so you are. All are brigands who help the aristocrats to defy the law."

"Mother Picot is a wicked and unfaithful old woman. Madame la Vicomtesse was her best friend," said Betty.

"Yes, I did all I could to warn them and to hurry them away. But they delayed too long, and you caught them as they were starting, unfortunately — you and your crowd of lunatics."

"Yes, we caught them as they were starting, fortunately," said Camille, and he smiled.

But Betty paid no attention to his manner or his looks.

"Where is M. le Vicomte?" she said, suddenly. "He came here last night to look for his father, as soon as we heard a report that the château was burning."

"Bernard Mercy is safe in prison, the first of the brood, on a charge of treason to the Republic, and of plotting the emigration of his family."

"What wickedness! He is one of the best men in the world," said Betty. "And besides that, I have heard him talk of all these changes as you yourself might have talked."

"Ah! He should have acted as he talked."

There was a minute's silence, while Betty, frowning, kept her eyes on the pathway. She was entirely at a loss what to do. How was it possible to start off in search of Constantine, without the slightest notion

where he and the Comte were to be found? And yet from what Camille said, going back to his father's house probably meant being arrested and put in prison, with very little chance of seeing Constantine again — for weeks or months, at least; Betty did not fear anything worse than a long imprisonment, either for herself or the boy. Then on the other hand, how was she to live? Where was she to hide? Winter was coming on, and even if there were no wolves or robbers to dread, how could she spend nights in the forest!

A cold wind rustled the faded vines, and swung the long briars overhead. Betty shivered even in the folds of her great cloak, and the awful desolation that weighed upon her shook her courage for a moment, so that her sad heart made two tears fall suddenly from under her dark drooping lashes. The next moment she dashed them away, furious with herself, for Camille came very close and seized both her hands, holding them so tight that she could not at first pull them away.

"Betty," he said, in a low, hurried voice, "the moment has come for me to tell you something, I would have told you yesterday, but Constantine was there, and you looked and spoke so scornfully. But I think you must know already — you must know what it is that has always kept me back from going all lengths with my father. Since you came here, you must know how I have watched your face to see what you thought of things; yes, even when you were hardly more than a

child, you taught me what honour and nobleness meant. Your face has been the inspiration of my music — of everything good I have ever thought of doing — And, Betty, at a word from you now I will give up all my prospects — for I love you; you are my ideal — though I dare scarcely hope that I am yours."

"No, indeed you are not," thought Betty; for while thunderstruck by this sudden declaration, what impressed her most at the moment was its absurdity. Camille had always shown her a kind of awkward devotion, and in her way she had liked him, but it was a liking that kept dangerously near toleration. As to this — Betty was a young person by no means without family pride, and even if poor Camille had been as handsome, agreeable and charming as any prince, M. Durand's son could never have seemed a possible match for Miss Maynard of King's Cross. If she and Constantine had been compelled by their uncle's selfish arrangements to live for the best years of their youth among French *bourgeois*, this did not at all mean, to Betty's mind, being lowered to their level.

"Let my hands go, if you please, Monsieur Camille, and let me pass," she said with dignity, though her voice trembled.

"*That* cannot be my answer."

"I have no other to give you."

"I will not take that for an answer," he said, and there was a manliness in his tone which made the girl listen in spite of herself.

"Don't be afraid," he went on; "I will not trouble

you with any more protestations. You know the truth now, if you never did before, and even if it makes you angry I want you to look at it in the light of the present. Do you understand me? I will speak plainly at the risk of offending you. My father and Poulain and the Committee have you in their black books — by no fault of mine, for they know nothing of that letter, but because it is known that by some means you were able to warn the family at Mercy-le-Comte last night. You are in danger. They will certainly put you in prison, for the public safety, and it is a serious thing to get into prison now — even your nationality may not be of much use to you. I do not know what you are to do; there is no shelter for you in this neighbourhood. I cannot let you go back to my father's house, unless" — he hesitated, for Betty's look and manner were far from encouraging — "unless as my promised wife — or better still, as my wife actually. Oh, do not hate me, Betty! There is another way. I will carry you off to the coast, if you like, and we can be married at Bec-sur-mer, and escape to England. I should be a queer sort of *émigré*, but I would do it to save you."

Betty's answer was very strange. "Poulain!" she said, with her eyes cast down, and her dreamy tone suggested that she had only heard the first sentences of his speech. "Was Poulain in the coach with Madame la Vicomtesse and her daughters?"

"Yes. He would get in. I could not help it. They did not like it, of course, but he did no harm," said Camille, staring at her.

"And you come to me after your morning's work, and say all this!" said Betty, laughing suddenly and desperately, but with bitter scorn. "No, I do not want your help, Mr. National Guard, on your conditions. If I must go to prison, I must, for I am starving, and I am going first straight to your mother to ask for some breakfast. Then I have Adrienne's cloak to return to her; and then, if you please, you can take me before the Committee at the Golden Lion. Ah! do not make a fool of yourself!" the girl added roughly, stamping her foot, for Camille fell on his knees in the pathway. "Let me pass, I say. Ah, in good time, here is your mother."

The *citoyenne* Durand, who had been much puzzled by seeing her son rush away into the vineyards after his long night's work, instead of coming in for his morning coffee, was not likely to be pleased or softened by finding him at the feet of the treacherous English girl, of whose detestable devotion to the aristocrats all Mercy was talking.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTIVE.

"I trust the end and sing within my walls."

Betty's scornful rejection of her one friend among the revolutionists was not followed by the least shadow of regret, even when he had disappeared among the vines, escaping from his mother's wrath, and when Madame Durand had led her back to the house under a storm of reproaches, had snatched Adrienne's cloak roughly from her shoulders, calling her a thief, and had pushed her upstairs to her own little room and bolted the door upon her. Betty did not even think, that morning, of climbing down by the stem of the old vine, as she and Con had done so long ago. She sat down by her bed, cold and dead to everything, only conscious of an agony of exhaustion. In a few minutes she laid down her head against the mattress and fell fast asleep. She was not roused even by the unbolting of the door, or by the two elder Durands coming in together, Madame carrying a cup of coffee and a piece of bread, Monsieur smiling and whistling, with his hands in his pockets. They both stood still inside the door and looked at the sleeping girl, pale, weary, with white

cheeks and reddened eyelids, and all her dark hair tumbling in untidy curls round her head.

"So, so, that was our young lady's game, was it?" muttered Jean Durand, between his teeth. "Not satisfied with joining in the plots of the *ci-devants*, she must amuse herself by making a fool of my unfortunate son. That ass should be clapped in prison too, but for fear of displeasing you, my dear wife."

"No, leave Camille to me: I will answer for him," said Madame Durand. "You have made a fine harvest to-day without concerning yourself about him, and he has done his duty; you cannot deny it. What would you have! young men will be young men, and the girl attracted him. I wish she and her brother had never come to Mercy."

M. Durand shrugged his shoulders. "But how did she attract him? that is the mystery. Plain, awkward, stupid, and with the most odious manners; giving herself airs, as if none of us were good enough for her and she could not make a friend of any one below the rank of a Vicomtesse! Ah! she and her fine friends will all have a lesson now. I have sometimes wondered how Mademoiselle Betty's pride was to be taken down. She had better mind her manners now; she has put herself most satisfactorily in the wrong."

Madame Durand hesitated. Her manner was much quieter, though her face was terribly stern, and there was a dangerous light in her eyes as she gazed at Betty.

"I think I could forgive everything but her bad influence on Camille," she said. "Well, I must wake

her, for she must not starve, and you have no time to waste."

"No, indeed. With carriages and carts full of prisoners on my hands, I am not likely to stand long talking sentiment over a wretched little *Anglaise*."

He stood whistling the *Marseillaise*, while his wife shook Betty roughly by the shoulder. The girl started to her feet, but was so stiff and cramped that she staggered and nearly fell.

"Eat and drink," said Madame Durand, "and listen to what my husband has to say to you."

Betty had been asleep for an hour or more, so profoundly tired that she could not at once awake to the full reality of things. She thanked Madame Durand mechanically, drank the coffee and broke off a morsel of bread. Then Durand spoke. He put on an air of great importance, his small eyes blinked maliciously, but there was no absolute rudeness in his manner. If Betty had known it, for some reason or other he was less insolent to the English girl who had lived three years in his house than to the Vicomtesse de Mercy and her daughters, whom he had just ordered off to prison. He told Betty he was sorry she had forgotten her duty so completely as to enter into plots with the aristocrats, to help them to disobey the laws of their country. He was sorry, too, that she had so far misled that charming boy, her brother, as to send him into unknown dangers in such bad company as that of the old citizen Mercy. Why could they not both have remained quiet in a home where they were cherished,

instead of bringing discredit on the Mayor's household, as well as on the name of their excellent uncle? He regretted sincerely, Betty would believe, that he could not allow such a dangerous person as herself to remain at liberty. She had too plainly shown herself an enemy to the Republic: his own honour would be affected by the very suspicion of favouring such a conspirator. Besides, she would not herself be safe at large, for her proceedings were known, and she was in quite as bad odour as the aristocrats themselves.

M. Durand smiled and rubbed his hands, though at the same time he put on a false air of almost fatherly concern. Betty, revived by the hot coffee, went on eating her bread with truly English coolness, and had quite regained all her senses by the time he had done.

"You will answer to my uncle for any ill-treatment of me, monsieur," she said, her pale face flushing scarlet.

"Ah, well—let me entreat you not to make matters worse by forgetting the laws of the Republic, *citoyenne*. — Yes, but your worthy uncle is a long way off, and has not betrayed very much interest in you and your brother since he placed you in my charge. I do not think he will interfere. Now, if you have finished your breakfast, let me conduct you downstairs. Ah, my dear child," he went on, as Betty rose at once to go with him, "if you had used your opportunities, if you had imbibed all the philosophical thought, all the poetry, which I have tried all this time to pour into deaf ears, you would have known better than to ruin

yourself by throwing your weight into the scale of a decayed civilisation, a rotten old world. I had better hopes of Constantine — he was a promising pupil — and my disappointment in him I put down entirely to you."

M. Durand went on talking in a more or less friendly fashion all the way downstairs. He seemed to have forgiven or forgotten Betty's chief sin in his wife's eyes, her conquest of Camille; at any rate, fortunately for Betty, he made no allusion to it. His wife smiled grimly as she followed him. She understood that he was in the highest spirits. Without putting himself very specially forward, and leaving all the most violent language and the most conspicuous and odious work to his colleague Poulain, he was slowly but surely compassing all that he had aimed at since the first days of the Revolution. He was now the greatest man in the whole district of Mercy-le-Roy; the Comte de Mercy, whom he had hated and envied all his life, was a poor fugitive, worth no more than the merest beggar on the roads, and with far worse prospects before him; the Comte's son and his whole family were prisoners, accused of plotting against the government and attempting to emigrate against the law. All the property of the family would be immediately confiscated to the nation; and Durand knew well enough, from what had already happened in other parts of France, that he could buy both châteaux and as much land as he pleased, without paying any large price. No wonder that the Mayor of Mercy was in such an excellent

temper. His son might be unexpectedly foolish, his English pupils might be heartlessly ungrateful; but his sense of supreme power made these things of not much consequence after all. He had never liked Betty Maynard; he had always felt her dislike of him, from that first moment when she descended from the Comte's coach at his gate, and came forward to speak for Camille — no doubt the first cause of the silly youth's fancy. Now she was going to be punished for everything; but M. Durand in his position felt that he could take high ground, and satisfy any old grudges in a high-principled, patriotic, comfortable way.

Betty did not take much notice of his manner or his words. She followed him silently out into the yard, where a file of soldiers was waiting. Camille was nowhere to be seen. The day had clouded over, and it was raining. As Betty passed out bareheaded, Adrienne came forward and threw her large cloak suddenly over her shoulders. Betty looked round, astonished, to meet the kind dark eyes full of tears.

"Take it, take it," said Adrienne. "I don't want it, child, I have another: and here, take your money too. I do not sell my clothes."

For a moment Betty was inclined to throw back the louis-d'or, which the good woman pressed into her hand; but then she remembered that it might be of great use in prison. She smiled bravely back at Adrienne.

"I will repay you some day," she said.

"Come, Adrienne, what are you doing there?" said M. Durand, sharply. "Helping the enemies of the nation?" but he did not take the cloak or the money away.

Then Betty, a prisoner, though with hands free, and almost falling asleep once more as she walked in what seemed like some strange dream, crossed the square guarded by four soldiers, half conscious of the dark unfriendly faces and cruel mocking cries of the crowd which was now slowly dispersing after the hunt of aristocrats which had amused it that morning, and found herself, to her own vague surprise, being marched in at the great gate of the château. There was a smell of burning, some low roofs were still smoking, and the black ashes of a great bonfire smouldered on the stones of the courtyard. There were National Guards on duty at both gateways, and on the steps, at the high doorway of the hall, a man came forward laughing, with his red cap cocked on his head more jauntily than most, and flourishing a pike in his hand.

"Ha, Citizen Mayor, this is a fine morning's work!" he cried in a harsh voice, stamping his feet on the stones. "What are you bringing me now? another aristocrat?"

"A friend of the aristocrats: she may call herself one, for aught I know," sneered Durand in answer. "Yes, put her with the others; they may as well enjoy their prison together."

"So they may," said the other man, with a loud laugh. "Follow me, guards; and you, my young lady.

I'll show you to the drawing-room of Madame la Vicomtesse."

Betty stared in astonished horror. This man, who appeared to be the jailor of the Mercy prisoners, she had often seen before; it was Baptiste, the faithful old servant of the Comte. The change in him appeared to her so terrible that when he turned to her she shut her eyes. He roared with laughing again.

"Come, come," he said. "We won't cut off your head to-day, my little *Anglaise*. Come, don't be frightened; follow me."

"What has happened to Baptiste Mingot?" said one of the other men to Durand. "Only yesterday he was ready to lick the dust before old Mercy."

"He has thought better of it," smiled the Mayor, in answer. "He has always been an honest fellow, but he had his living to make, you see, and he was brought up from a child in these people's service. Did you see him yesterday, when we entered the château? He was ready to show us everything. He rang the great bell, as a sign that the Republic had triumphed, and ran up the tricolour flag on the tower. He offered to take charge of the prisoners, and there could not be a better person, for he knows every corner of this old dungeon. Besides, he knows them: he will make them feel their new position as no one else could."

"What became of the other servants?"

"Some of them ran away — some of them are hiding here and there. We shall catch them and punish them one of these days. Lucien and old Henri are shut up

in yonder tower, and we have sent the steward from Mercy-Citoyen to keep them company."

Meanwhile, Betty followed the strange jailor across the hall, where the yellow satin furniture was thrown into heaps, and half the portraits had been torn down from the walls. Two National Guards kept close behind her; but when they passed out into the corridor beyond Baptiste sent these men back, saying that there were others waiting a few yards further on. For a minute, in the cold, half-dark, vaulted passage, Betty was left alone with this man, whom she regarded with unconcealed horror.

He came up close to her and said in a low hurried tone, with a change of manner which bewildered her utterly: "The English lady is to be trusted? I know it. Will she take this, and when she finds a secret opportunity, give it to Madame la Vicomtesse. And say to her that Baptiste remembers a sermon of M. le Curé's, and his text was, 'Be ye wise as serpents!'"

With these words Baptiste drew a small leather case from an inner pocket, and put it into Betty's hand. She instantly hid it in her dress, too much astonished to speak, even when he added hastily: "Mademoiselle's brother has escaped with M. le Comte. I am in hopes they will save themselves. The little gentleman is a hero."

Then he tramped noisily on towards the door at the end of the corridor, which was opened with a great clanking of keys and chains. Two more guards were waiting here. The next door to be opened was that of

the beautiful Louis-Quinze *salon* opening on the terrace, which Betty remembered well. It was in a strange state now, however. It seemed as if the furniture had been flung against the great mirrors, which were starred and splintered in every direction. A few broken chairs lay on the once beautiful floor, now scratched and muddy and marked by the tramp of a crowd. At the end of the room there was a great heap of straw, where two or three figures were lying in attitudes of despair. At first Betty could recognise no one, for there was not much light; the windows had been boarded as high as their top panes, so that only pale slanting gleams made their way in, and glimmered uncertainly in the heavy dusty atmosphere. A woman with her head on her knees was sobbing in a corner. Louis de Mercy lay full length on the straw, his face bound up with his mother's pocket-handkerchief. She, pale as a marble statue, sat close to him, with one girl's head in her lap and the other leaning against her shoulder. On the bare hearth, in front of the splendid old carved chimney-piece that reached to the ceiling, stood the Vicomte de Mercy, with his arms folded and his eyes on the floor, his brows knit in a frown which seemed more puzzled than angry. On the remains of two chairs, leaning their elbows on a small marble table, talking in low tones with their heads together, were the former Curé of Mercy-le-Roy, who had refused the tricolour cockade and then the constitutional oath, and the good old priest from Mercy-le-Comte, who by acting as chaplain at the château had brought himself under the law.

Into the room thus occupied came Betty, still muffled in her cloak. None of the Mercy party seemed at first to notice her entrance, but the younger of the two Curés, a stern, outspoken man, lifted his head and said, "Jailor, tell your master that humanity forbids crowding this room with any more prisoners. It is only your abominable trick of saving yourselves trouble. Take that woman away; you have plenty of room in the château."

"Who are you, citizen, to talk of my master!" retorted Baptiste, with a laugh. "I suppose you mean the citizen Durand. He is no more my master than you are."

"No, villain," said the Vicomte, suddenly. "What have you done with your master?"

"You should be thankful that he is not here with the rest of you," answered the man, in the same rough tone. "There, *citoyenne*," giving Betty a slight push, "make yourself at home. If these *ci-devants* are not civil to me, I shall fill the room so that they will not have place to stand upright."

With this threat he went away, locking and bolting the door with a great noise. No one took any notice of Betty: the cloak she wore was of a common kind among well-to-do peasants, and covered her from head to foot. For a minute or two she stood inside the door, irresolute; it seemed rather terrible to be forced to intrude on these people in their agony, deepened as she felt it must be by the scene of it, the beautiful saloon where in past years they had met together for so many happy and brilliant gatherings.

But presently she could stand there no longer: she crept along by the wall, treading lightly in the silence, for the two priests had left off talking now, and there was no sound in the room but the sobbing and sighing of poor Madame Bonne as she sat rocking herself on a corner of the heap of straw. Betty passed her with a glance of half-scornful pity; it was a time for anything but tears. She knew what might have turned them into laughter — that the rough jailor, the seeming renegade Baptiste, was in reality a friend; but she understood very well how much depended on keeping that secret from all indiscreet persons. It was however with a warm feeling of hope at her heart, both for these imprisoned friends and for Constantine, that she stole to Madame de Mercy's feet, crouched down there, and looked into her face without speaking.

"Who is this? Go away, girl!" said Victoire de Mercy, sharply, while Marie raised her head from her mother's lap and began to cry and moan.

"Silence, Marie! remember who you are, for all our sakes!" exclaimed the Vicomtesse; but if she spoke quickly and sternly, she laid a very tender hand on the girl's fair head. "Is it you, Betty?" she murmured, leaning forward. "Ah, my child, I am sorry to see you here."

"I am glad, madame," said Betty, "glad to be with you."

In a few minutes, it seemed, and without any effort or strangeness, the English girl in her strength and calmness was established as nurse and comforter to

these three suffering creatures. She found a cushion which had been thrown into a corner, made Madame de Mercy lie down on the straw with her head on this, and covered her with her own cloak; then she sat down close by and took the two girls into her arms as if she had been their elder sister. Louis still lay motionless, and Betty did not attempt then to show any kindness to the poor young fellow, hurt in his pride even more than in his beauty. Madame Bonne's sobs became gradually quieter; the three men at the end of the room watched Betty's proceedings with silent interest. They all waited in silence for what the day would bring forth. As noon drew on, very low at first, then rising clear and sweet, a young voice with an English accent repeated in French the 107th Psalm: — Betty had learnt it by heart since that night of the thunder-storm.

"For he brought them out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death: and brake their bonds in sunder.

"Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness: and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men!

"For He hath broken the gates of brass: and smitten the bars of iron in sunder." . . .

The bars were indeed broken just then for Magdeleine de Mercy; she was asleep, and smiling in her sleep, long before the Psalm was finished.

CHAPTER XV.

FUGITIVES.

"Live a little; comfort a little; cheer thyself a little. If this uncouth forest yield anything savage, I will either be food for it, or bring it for food to thee."

Thus Betty Maynard's attempt to save her friends had only landed her in prison. And it seemed as if Constantine's share in these adventures had also been a failure; for a boy of sixteen, plunged suddenly into a wild and unfamiliar country, in the dangerous company of a feeble old man threatened by revolutionary law, was hardly likely to make good his own escape; much less that of his companion.

The park of the Château de Mercy-le-Roy was in a great part surrounded by a lonely, forest-like tract of country, though not by actual thick woods except to the south, where uncultivated commons, marshy and solitary, rose gradually to higher ground and were lost in the great forest of Longuet, which with various breaks stretched on southwards to the Loire, thus nearly approaching the Bocage country, afterwards so well known as La Vendée.

It was not at all in this direction, however, that the

Comte and his young companion at first meant to go. Their object, as soon as they left the park, was to turn sharp to the left, walking first north, then west, and working their way round through the pine-woods that bordered the vineyards towards the Mercy-le-Comte road. The delays however had been so long that it was more than twilight, nearly dark, when they began their rough walk among rocks and trees, up and down sandy banks, keeping purposely away from any road or path, of which indeed there were not many in that neighbourhood. In an ordinary autumn, these woods and heathery wastes would have been the scene of grand hunts from the Château de Mercy; cheerful horns would have sounded, the Comte's hounds, his gaily-dressed *piqueurs* and huntsmen, would have careered gaily about the grey and silent land, rousing deer, wild boar or wolf from their lairs in the forest. The merry train of horsemen would have gone clattering down the mossy drives, now so dark and still, while the peasants took their share in the sport by running through the underwood to drive the game, and all ended at last by a torch-light procession to the court of the castle, where the hungry hounds were fed and the people danced and the hunters feasted royally in the hall. All those gay doings were over, never to be seen again in the old feudal splendour, though the hunts in the forests of Maine and Anjou will be a spectacle as long as France lasts and any of her nobles linger.

M. de Mercy, who had ridden so often through those woods with his friends and servants, was now wandering

in them a lonely fugitive, a weary, bewildered old man; his house, as far as he knew, burning behind him, his faithful servants false to him, his neighbours turned into bitter enemies; no friend, no companion, but a foreign lad nearly as helpless as himself, and quite ignorant of the country, for the young Maynards had been kept very closely at Mercy during the three years of their life in Durand's house. It was not very strange, under the circumstances, that the Comte and his companion lost their way. They had been walking for two or three hours, and in the dark and windy night it was almost impossible to take any bearings. Constantine, though with an uneasy mind, could only trust to the Comte's knowledge of the country, and hope against hope that the rugged paths were leading to the point he was anxious to gain, the cross-roads where Betty had promised to wait for him. He was sure that at first on leaving the park they had turned the right way; afterwards he got confused, and could not help distrusting two or three twists in the faint track through bracken and heather, shadowed by birch and pine-trees, which they were slowly following. Afterwards, when the Comte assured him that they were walking south, and must soon strike the road to Mercy-le Comte, he was a little comforted; only the way seemed to him unnaturally long, and M. de Mercy leaned more and more heavily on his arm, and the walking too was heavy and sometimes wet, and they went on and on without coming to any road, though the black sky in front seemed barricaded by a wall of something blacker,

into which, wearily climbing a last slippery hill, they at last found themselves plunging, and had to feel their way among the trunks of trees, while a great owl hooted suddenly above their heads, and there were rustlings in the branches and in the long grass and the brushwood about their feet. The forest scents, the forest noises of the night, with their great endless background of forest silence, were all around them, and there was also a wild lonely feeling of unfamiliar ground, of immeasurable distance, as if in some strange dream, from any known soil or trees or neighbourhood.

"I do not quite know where we are," said the old man.

His voice trembled slightly, and he leaned so heavily on Constantine that the boy could hardly support him.

"Surely, sir, we cannot be far from the road now," he said, in answer.

"I do not know," the Comte replied. "Ah! what is that?"

The clang of a great bell, very distant, was borne upon the wind to their ears. They had heard it before that evening; it was the alarm-bell of the château. At the same time over the black and desolate country there arose a red glow in the sky. They both stood perfectly silent, looking and listening, for two or three minutes. At last the Comte said, "They are burning my house!" and Constantine felt the hand on his arm relax suddenly, as the old man sank helplessly to the ground.

He tried to break his fall, lifted his head, rubbed

his hands and temples, and knelt supporting him in his arms, at first in terror, thinking he was dead. But in a few moments the Comte spoke and moved.

"Thank you, my good boy," he said. "It is nothing; it is only that my old limbs will carry me no further. They have set up a small revolution on their own account: they ask why they should be my slaves for ever. Very reasonable, especially as I have brought them so far out of the way. Do you know where we are, Constantine?"

"Monsieur," said the boy, "the wind being north-west, we are south-east of Mercy-le-Roy — and the road to Mercy-le-Comte runs to the north-west of it. We have come a wrong way — but I don't know how."

"Ah! but I do. I made one turn to the right, but it was wrong; there is a little paradox for you," said the Comte, almost gaily, so that Constantine peered at him in wonder through the darkness. "We are here in the edge of the forest of Longuet, and here we must stay till daylight, for two reasons: one, that it is large and dangerous, and I cannot exactly remember where the road crosses it; the other, that my legs refuse to carry me a yard further. We must make the best of it. See, that light is dying down. I think it is only a great bonfire; Mercy rejoicing at being rid of its tyrants. Perhaps the populace has found its way to the cellars, and some specially jovial spirit worked off his excitement by ringing the bell. Courage and patience! if my children have escaped, I care little. But you have no supper, my poor boy! Are you hungry?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am rather hungry, but I can bear it," said Constantine.

"I wonder what became of Baptiste!" said M. de Mercy.

Constantine wondered many things, as he crouched there supporting his old friend in the darkness. He wondered whether the servants had been false; whether the treasure had been discovered; and more than all he wondered what had become of Betty. Had she carried out her part of the plan, or had she waited too long for him and the Comte and thus fallen into the hands of the enemy? Perhaps it was more likely that she had gone on to Mercy-le-Comte, and escaped with the family there. Thinking of her on her way to the coast, Constantine felt a little chill of loneliness at his heart; but then came a conviction which half comforted him, half made him more uneasy — Betty would never leave France without him.

The wind howled among the forest trees, and now and then brought again across the lonely country the wild, irregular clang of that distant bell. It was impossible to know what it meant — perhaps that the Comte's servants were defending the château against the revolutionists. When this idea flashed on Constantine's mind, he almost started up in his excitement; but then he remembered how unlikely it was: half a dozen men against hundreds.

The Comte did not speak again, and presently Constantine perceived by his breathing that he was asleep. He wrapped his cloak more carefully round him, and

very gently lowered his head to a soft cushion of moss at the foot of the great tree which sheltered them. Still crouching beside him, though in a less cramped position than at first, the boy resolved to stay awake all night. They might be hunted, pursued; or wild beasts might find them out; he dared not light a fire, for it was too plain that this high border of the forest was visible from many miles away. He took out the knife he had bought from Remy the Gascon, and held it in readiness to defend his companion and himself. There he sat at the Comte's head, leaning against the trunk of the tree, whose smooth bark told him that it was a beech, and gazing out through the darkness to where a pale shadowy glimmer showed the open country: the redness on the horizon had nearly died away.

He had resolved to stay awake all night. But presently his head drooped forward, his heavy eyelids fell; the knife slipped from his hand down among the dead leaves. Both the old man and the boy lay sleeping, out there in the woods, as soundly and quietly as they had ever slept within four walls. Nothing disturbed them; no enemy or wild beast came near; it seemed as if those angels who have the helpless in special charge watched over their night's rest.

Constantine woke with a start just as the first rays of the rising sun were shining golden through the wood, and making green grass and yellow leaves glow and glitter. All the little world around him, fresh from a shower, shone as if it had been newly washed and polished with morning dew; beyond, the low

marsh country lay in a gilded mist. On the opposite hills, at that very time, Betty was watching the early sun-rays fall on the terrible cavalcade from Mercy-le Comte as it approached Mercy-le-Roy.

Constantine hastily rubbed his eyes and turned to his companion. The fine, delicate old face, which looked as if it might be carved in ivory, lay peacefully against the moss at the foot of the grey beech-bole. The Comte was still asleep; yes, it was sleep, though in a moment's fear Constantine laid his hand on his heart, and leaned over to make sure that he was breathing. Then something suddenly distracted the boy's attention. He heard the tramp of a horse not many yards away.

He listened for a moment or two in the most anxious perplexity. To all appearance they were just inside the boundary of a pathless forest which they had reached by tramping across a country where there were nothing but tracks made by peasants or cattle. They certainly had not been conscious of the neighbourhood of any road. The Comte had said that there was a road through the forest, but he did not know where it was. Plainly, however, he had wandered out of his reckoning so completely that they were very near it: that horse's feet were clanking on the stones with which it was no doubt paved. Was the rider a friend or an enemy? Then, listening more intently, Constantine was aware that the horse's tread was not alone; a man was walking beside him, and whistling the *Marseillaise*, but rather low, as if merely to cheer

himself on his way. Something in that whistle, in spite of the tune, had a friendly sound to Constantine's ears. Rising noiselessly to his feet, and catching up his knife from the moss, he stole forward through the close phalanx of trees in what seemed to him the direction of the road. A dozen yards brought him to the ragged edge of a bank, screened by blackberry briars. In a little hollow about fifteen feet below ran the narrow paved road, full of ruts and holes and standing pools of water, for it had been left unmended for three years at least. Here it made a turn eastward, mounting a slope at the same time, so that the place where Constantine waited, hidden behind the bushes, was a fine point of vantage for robbers or bad characters of any kind, and had often served their purpose, no doubt, in less civilised times.

Constantine advanced as near as he dared to the edge of the bank, and peered down through the bushes ; the man and horse were now almost directly beneath him, and would come into sight in another moment. In order to see better without being seen, he lay down on his face and crawled forward. In doing so he made a little rustle among the dead leaves; the man looked up as he turned the corner, saw the boy's red cap and instantly clicked a pistol which he snatched from his belt.

"Who goes there?" he said, in a low voice. "Somebody who is after no good!"

"Remy! Remy!" cried Constantine joyously in answer.

He threw himself over the edge of the steep bank, and half scrambling, half rolling, descended into the road under the nose of the steady old pack-horse, who pricked his ears, but gave no other sign of astonishment.

"Why, it is the little Englishman!" said Remy, his white teeth and his black eyes smiling, while he put back his pistol. "What may he be doing in the forest? I saw him last climbing the big chestnut-tree behind my stall at Mercy."

"Yes, you did. I wanted to warn the Comte, and to save him, and I have saved him — at least, I don't know how to get him any further. We walked all this distance last night. The alarm-bell rang, and Baptiste went back, and we lost our way, for we wanted to go to Mercy-le-Comte — do you see" —

"It would have been difficult to lose the way more entirely," laughed Remy, "but certainly the Saints guided you, and we may say it was rather gain than loss. Mercy-le-Comte was not exactly a place of safety last night. Father Poulain and that young Durand and a mob of people went over and stopped the little plan for emigrating. They caught the *ci-devants* just starting off in their coach, and escorted coach and all to Mercy-le-Roy. It was a queer sight, I assure you, their entry into the town. They had the young Mercy on horseback, and a strange object he looked; he resisted, it seems, and made insulting remarks, so the people amused themselves with pelting him a little. I felt sorry for the poor lad, though he has always a terrible air about him."

"What have they done with them?" asked Constantine, staring in horror.

"Locked them up in the château, I believe."

"And my sister!"

"Your sister?"

"Yes — yes — was she with them?"

Remy shook his head. "I know nothing about your sister," he said.

But his face was full of kindness as he looked at the boy. He might have understood the struggle that was going on in that brave, loving young heart. As Constantine stood there, twisting his knife in his hands and looking down with eager, thoughtful eyes, he was longing intensely to set off at once back to Mercy-le-Roy, to trace Betty on her way, to find her, to share her fate whatever it might be. After all, was he not his sister's lawful protector? But then, it meant deserting the feeble old man who had trusted him. How could he do that? how could he even leave him to the care of Remy, who probably would not care for such a charge, and whom he only trusted after all by instinct, for he knew nothing about him! No, it could not be. Betty would say the same: loyalty to his trust must come before everything. He lifted his eyes and looked at the strong little horse laden with his master's pack of cutlery, then at Remy himself, who was watching him curiously.

"Where are you going, Remy?" he said.

"I am going to make a little tour among the châteaux of the Bocage," answered the pedlar. "This

country is too disturbed for me; these riots and changes are bad for trade. Down beyond the river people have different ideas; they find themselves very well as they are, and they don't waste their strength pulling each other's houses down. Between you and me and my Blanco here, little citizen, they don't love the Republic in those parts. And one of these days they may show their feelings: I should not be surprised. They tried it last August; they will try it again if the world goes too fast for them. Strange people, to be sure; but they are loyal to the King and the Church, and I can understand them, though I expect the Convention will be too strong for them in the end: it has the biggest tyranny at its back, I fear. Well, and can I do anything to help you, in the meanwhile?"

"Yes — stay a minute — have you got any food? We are starving."

"There is some bread and cheese in this bag, but can the old citizen eat it?"

"I'll ask him. And Remy — could we travel with you? That would be a safe country for him, if the people are so loyal; and when he is with friends there I can come back to look for Betty."

"He is very feeble?" said Remy.

"Yes; indeed he is. I don't know if he can walk at all. But I cannot let him stay here. Either we shall starve in the woods, or his enemies will find him. If I have to carry him, I must get him away from here."

Remy smiled again as he looked at the boy's slight figure and eager face. He had himself a good deal to

consider, more than the young Englishman seemed to realise. All his worldly goods were loaded on Blanco's fat back, and he knew enough of the times to suspect that he would forfeit both them and his liberty, perhaps his life, if it was known that he had helped in the escape of a *ci-devant*. What had the Comte de Mercy ever done for him, that he should run such a risk? It was certainly a matter for hesitation. Yet he liked the straight-forward, spirited lad and wished to help him; and he had a soft heart for any fellow-creature in trouble, though he wore a red cap and whistled the *Marseillaise*.

"Well!" he said, at last. "The only trouble will be at the ferry, and there your old gentleman must stoop so far as to pass for my grandfather. We must manage to disguise you both a little before we get there. Come, there's no time to be lost," and with sudden energy he began unloading Blanco. "Take the food with you, and go and fetch him."

"But Remy, what are you doing?" said Constantine.

"I thought you said that your old gentleman couldn't walk. He must ride my beast, and you and I must carry the packs. How else did you think we could take him, little master?"

"How good you are! Let me carry it all."

"No, I'm not good," said Remy, shaking his head and smiling still more. "Ask the Curé of our parish. But even a good-for-nothing like me can help a friend in trouble. And I owe your Comte something for the

shade of his big chestnut-tree on market-days. I hope they won't cut it down. As to carrying my whole pack, you will find half of it enough, I promise you."

In spite of his uneasiness about Betty, Constantine had seldom been happier than he was all that day, tramping through the forest with a good weight on his back, sharing Remy's plain and moderate rations, listening to his wonderful stories and to the songs with which he sometimes ventured to cheer the way. This south-country pedlar had something in him of the minstrel, the jester, of earlier centuries. His cleverness and good humour made him welcome everywhere. Nothing troubled him much; he was light-hearted by nature; good manners, too, came to him by nature; and Constantine liked him all the better for his respectful bearing towards the old Comte, whom he called "M. le Comte" in spite of the laws of the Republic.

Blanco carried his new burden as gently as he could over those uneven ways. In the lonely forest roads they met no one. The Comte was very silent; he seemed to have resigned himself into the hands of his two companions; once, when Remy had told him, in softened terms, of the capture of his children and grandchildren, his pale cheeks flushed a little and they saw him brush away a tear. Then when Remy was a few yards behind he stretched out a thin white hand and laid it on Constantine's shoulder.

"My child," he said, "you and that honest man are risking much for me. You had better have left me to sleep away my useless life under the trees yonder.

What is the use of saving that which must end so soon? And I have been thinking, dear boy — what has become of your sister?"

"I don't know, monsieur," Constantine answered bravely. "But when you are safe with those good people beyond the Loire I shall go back and find her. She would not like me to leave you — and I think God will take care of her, you know."

A fresh sweet wind rustled the branches, and a friendly sunbeam fell direct on the boy's bright face, while the old man gazed at it wistfully. Remy the pedlar, coming up behind, whistled a gay southern tune.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHRISTMAS IN ENGLAND.

"Christmas hath a darkness
Brighter than the blazing noon,
Christmas hath a chillness
Warmer than the heat of June."

The winter of 1792 was a strange and solemn time for all Europe, and especially for France, laugh and dance as she might in her new state of so-called Liberty. The Terror was drawing near, and every day brought fresh signs that France was no longer a safe abode for moderate and reasonable people. King Louis XVI's mock trial was carried on through the month of December, to end in the great national crime of his execution on January 21, 1793. Half Europe was already at war with France. England, always slow to draw the sword, remained at peace till after the murder of the King; but everybody knew through the last months that war was inevitable. That Christmas of 1792 was the last peaceful Christmas for more than twenty years.

In little English towns like King's Cross, Christmas was kept with all its old-fashioned rejoicings, even in

that year of anxiety. The mummers and the carol-singers went about the town; beef and blankets and loads of wood were distributed to the poor by the kindness of the neighbouring landowners, among whom the Rector of King's Cross, the Reverend George Lisle, stood prominent. Even Mr. Julius Maynard contributed his share to these charities. People said of him that he was a hard man, but not altogether ungenerous. The truth was, perhaps — a few suspected it — that Julius Maynard chose to keep himself straight with his neighbours, and on fair terms with his own conscience, not a very troublesome one, while he feathered his nest warmly and comfortably and lived like a prince on the fortune of his banished relations.

During that December, however, it seemed as if he had come to an end of his doings, both evil and good, for not long before Christmas he was taken seriously ill, and when Christmas Day came he was lying in such a state of fever and weakness that the doctor said the bells must not be rung. For the Christmas peal at King's Cross was the strongest in all the country round, and the crash and clang of those eight bells not only shook the church tower, but made the near houses tremble, while people could hardly hear each other speak for the noise. And the old Manor-house was nearer to the church than any other.

Mr. Lisle, grown very fat, and slow in all his movements, driving in from the Rectory in his carriage and pair, saw many discontented faces by the way and heard complaints that it was not like Christmas with-

out the bells. He felt it himself, and it took all his Christian charity not to countermand his order and let the bells strike up. But he remained firm, though even the church-wardens remonstrated in the vestry, saying that so poor a church-goer as Mr. Maynard hardly deserved that his neighbours' Christmas should be spoilt to give him ease. There was something queer, they remarked, about his dealings with his brother's children. The whole place talked, they told the Rector. Everybody said that Squire Constantine and his wife would have been ill pleased that their children should be brought up in a godless foreign country. But there they slept, poor bodies, under their stone in the churchyard, and they could not interfere with anything Mr. Julius chose to do, either with the children or the children's money. As for his professions, as for his nursing up the property for Miss Betty and Master Constantine, these responsible inhabitants of King's Cross shook their heads over it. No one would persuade them that Attorney Penn had clean fingers, and no one but he was in Mr. Julius' confidence. No, if the Christmas bells were stopped, a thing never known at King's Cross before, it should be for an honest man and a good Christian, not for one whom nobody trusted.

The Rector would not agree. He reminded them that the Good Samaritan did not stop to ask whether the poor man by the wayside was righteous; but he also reminded them of Julius Maynard's handsome subscriptions to the charities. He spoke with stiffness and authority, and then put on his surplice and

mounted to the reading-desk. Down below was the shining head of the clerk; opposite were the singers in a gallery, with the musicians and their various instruments. They had been tuning up vigorously, and when the Rector appeared they burst forth at once into "Hark, the herald angels sing." They made an extra noise that morning, perhaps to console the parish for the silence of the bells. The church was duly decorated with sprigs of holly and ivy, stuck upright in the corners of the pews. The red-cloaked children grinned as they thought of mince-pies.

Mr. Lisle was a warm-hearted man, and Christmas with its kindliness appealed to him. He was poetical, and all its associations touched him. As a rule, Christmas found him in a most appropriate frame of mind, and people used to say that the Rector's face when he wished them a merry Christmas did them as much good as a glass of his old port. But to-day he was not happy, in spite of the gleaming holly, the red sun that glinted in and touched his surplice, the hearty exertions of the choir. He had found the silence of the bells quite as depressing as other people. He did not particularly care in his heart whether Julius Maynard was well or ill, but the words of his church-wardens had struck and saddened him, though he had snubbed them as decidedly as a kind and courteous gentleman could. All through the Christmas service he was haunted by the faces of two children; he could see them in the now empty pew belonging to the Manor-house, where they used to stand on each side

of their parents when they were little, and close together, pale and sad in their mourning dress, when Constantine Maynard and his dear wife had both passed away. The Rector blamed himself for not having made more constant enquiries about the children since they were sent to France. It was an excuse that he disliked Julius, and never spoke to him if he could help it; but after all, an old friend had rights, and he had given up his very tamely, it seemed to him now. The news from France became more serious every day: war seemed imminent.

Mr. Lisle made several mistakes in the service that morning, to the great surprise of the clerk and the church-wardens, and preached his short Christmas sermon quite absently and without his usual spirit. When the service was over he went out of the vestry door and stood for some minutes under the east window, looking down on the damp tombstone which marked the place where the Maynards lay. Then he turned into the leafless avenue and paced down to the gate where his impatient horses were waiting. One of his church-wardens, Farmer Pratt, the most wide-awake of the two, was lingering under the trees talking to the coachman. He could not go home to his Christmas dinner, it seemed to him, without a friendly word from Mr. Lisle, and so he began rather awkwardly, lifting his hat as the Rector came up.

"I ask your pardon, sir, and so would Job Oliver if he was here, for speaking a bit plain about them bells, and about Miss Betty and Master Constantine" —

"Say no more, my good fellow," said the Rector, the old sweet smile breaking over his face. "I have made up my mind to move in the matter. We will have them home again, and then we will ring the bells as loud and as long as you please. There, go home to your dinner, and wish your wife and children a merry Christmas from me. — Not yet, Jarvis," he said to his coachman. "Drive round the market-place for a few minutes. I am going to the Manor-house."

He turned in at the iron gates, and was lifting his hand to the knocker on the tall door, when it suddenly opened, and little Mr. Penn appeared in his hat and coat, looking more starved and timid than ever.

"Mr. Lisle, I beg your pardon, sir — " he exclaimed respectfully.

The Rector looked down upon him from his own height and size and general well-being with a sort of kindly disdain, such as a big Newfoundland dog may be supposed to feel for a very small cur.

"A merry Christmas to you, Mr. Penn!" he said in his fine deep voice, which seemed to suggest roast turkey and champagne.

"The same to you, sir, I'm sure," muttered the attorney, very conscious that he had not been at church, and could therefore expect no indulgence from the Rector.

"How is Mr. Maynard?"

"Very sadly, sir, very sadly indeed. Dr. Parrott thinks ill of him. He is exceedingly weak, and though the fever does not run so high as it did, he is still quite

delirious — talks nonsense — not at all himself. I have tried once or twice to talk business with him, but he cannot understand a word I say."

"And how long has he been in this state — mentally, I mean?"

"For nigh upon a month."

"It is no use my attempting to see him, then?"

"Of course, sir, if you wish — I am afraid he is hardly in a state of mind — in fact, at the beginning of his illness I asked him if I should send for you, and he did not seem pleased. Oh, Mr. Lisle, you will not believe me," said the little man, trembling like a leaf, "but the sight of Mr. Julius in this condition terrifies me. It weighs upon me, sir. His wanderings are enough to alarm anybody's conscience. I cannot help asking myself how I shall feel, when I am laid low as he is. But I beg your pardon, sir."

"There is no occasion, Mr. Penn," answered the Rector, with grave kindness. "What you say is to your credit. It is well for us all to draw our own lessons from the trials of others. But I have a question to ask, and it is this — does Mr. Julius Maynard ever mention his nephew and niece?"

Lawyer Penn turned paler than ever, and his teeth chattered.

"Frequently, sir, frequently. But this is a matter — I dare not say much — but this is a matter that troubles me more than any. I am not at liberty to say much — but will you do me the honour to step into the parlour and take a seat?"

A large fire was burning in the white-panelled room where Julius Maynard had first opened to Mr. Penn his plans for the two children. Some packets of papers lay on the table, and three or four tin boxes were piled in a corner. The Rector did not sit down, but stood majestically before the fire, confronting little Penn, who leaned with one hand on the table.

"I will say to you, Mr. Maynard's man of business, what I would say to him if he could listen to me: Elizabeth and Constantine should be sent for home at once. We shall be at war with France shortly, and in any case that country is not safe. The young people have been there too long already, in my opinion. In fact, Mr. Penn, between ourselves, no one who knew Mr. Constantine Maynard could ever have felt sure of his approval of that step from the beginning."

"I said so — I told Mr. Julius — but he had his reasons," said the lawyer, hastily: then he turned red, and fidgeted uneasily.

"What were his reasons?" asked the Rector, in a deep voice like distant thunder.

To his companion's ears it bore a threat of exposure, of ruin; he remembered that Mr. Lisle was a magistrate, and wriggled more and more under his dignified gaze. But he need not have been so nervous, for the Rector was far indeed from suspecting the real state of things, or imagining how this lion and jackal had been doing their best to swallow up the children's fortune. Neither did he understand how the poor jackal, dragged into evil ways by stronger wickedness

than his own, would very gladly have repented and made restitution as far as he could. But his terror of Julius kept him "falsely true."

"Mr. Julius never did me the honour of explaining clearly," he muttered. "He has a great idea of the French language — I believe it was useful to him as a young man. But indeed, sir, I agree with you. And as I was saying, it is a matter that troubles me very much. I almost think that if Mr. Julius was in his right mind at this moment and knew himself so ill, he would send orders for the return of the children — of Miss Betty and Mr. Constantine — for they are not children any longer now — and he feels that; I do believe he does."

The Rector stroked his face thoughtfully. He had not expected anything more satisfactory than this from little Penn, whom he always regarded with more pity than dislike.

"No, they are not children any longer," he said. "Now, Mr. Penn, tell me frankly, does the doctor expect Mr. Julius Maynard to recover?"

"I am sadly afraid, sir, that he does not."

"Ah, I thought not. Otherwise he would hardly have taken the strong step of requesting me to have the Christmas peal stopped. I could not refuse, of course, but there has been some discontent and ill-feeling on the subject. Mr. Julius is not popular — not so popular as a Maynard ought to be in King's Cross."

"And yet he subscribes to the charities," murmured Penn.

"He does; but that is not everything. 'Many that were rich cast in much,' you remember. Well, Mr. Penn, I am going to take the law into my own hands. I am going to send for Miss Betty and Mr. Constantine. Be good enough to write down the address of their tutor."

"Indeed, sir — but if Mr. Julius recovers — if he disapproves" —

The Rector's nature was far from being suspicious; but something in the attorney's voice and manner startled him then, and made him look curiously at the little man as he bustled round in search of ink and paper for the address, which he did not dare — perhaps did not wish — to refuse.

"Is there any foul play in this affair, as Pratt and Oliver hinted?" said the Rector to himself. "In that case, I must act all the more quickly and decidedly." Aloud he said: "If Mr. Julius is an honest well-wisher to his young relatives, he cannot disapprove. They must not remain in a country with which we shall presently be at war."

"A Monsieur
Monsieur Durand
Mercy-le-Roy
Anjou
France."

Without further parley the lawyer wrote out this address in his neat little hand, and the Rector placed it safely in his pocket-book. Then he left the house with a kindly greeting; for whatever his suspicions, he could

not be out of charity with any man on Christmas Day. Little Penn went out bareheaded and opened the gates, while the carriage came rumbling up, the fat horses extremely impatient at being kept waiting in the frosty air.

Mr. Penn stood with his head on one side, looking rather like a melancholy bird, and watched the Rector drive away.

"Well," he said to himself, "'tis pretty certain that the fat will be in the fire if his worship's letter brings the children home. Mr. Julius meant to leave them there for two more years at least — yes, at least, for I've sometimes thought — however, I hope I'm wrong. But if he gets better he won't want them here; for his arrangements are not nearly completed, and it will be bad for me as well. Who knows! I may be brought to account in any case, whether he lives or dies. Well, I am weary of it all. What's a few thousand pound compared with peace of mind and honesty! I could rest in my bed before I knew Mr. Julius. I told the Rector that if Mr. Julius was himself he would send for them. Perhaps he would: he has said strange things in his wanderings. Anyhow, if he dies, they ought to be here. And the doctor thinks he will die."

Mr. Lisle's letter, conveying the news to M. Durand of Mr. Julius Maynard's serious illness, and requesting him to despatch his young charges as soon as possible with a proper escort on their way to England, was written and posted in due course, a few days after Christmas. But before it had reached Mercy-le-Roy —

for its journey across sea and land was a long one — it was followed by another which contained the announcement of Mr. Julius Maynard's death. The unworthy guardian left all his affairs in confusion, no one knowing anything about them or about the King's Cross estate, except Attorney Penn. He left no will, so that anything he had would be divided between his niece and nephew. He hardly regained consciousness before his death, though when the Rector visited him, and tried in his old-fashioned way to say a few good words, he turned his face to the wall and refused to listen. Thus he died without punishment in this world, and without making any reparation for his unfaithfulness; and on a dark January day he was laid with the others of his name in the Maynard vault, under the east window.

When all was over, little Penn had a long interview with Mr. Lisle, and came back from the Rectory with a more cheerful face than he had worn for many a year. Mr. Lisle kept his own counsel, but the parishioners were rather surprised, on the following Sunday, to see him publicly shake hands with Penn in the church avenue.

Now all would have been well, if the children could have been brought home. But no answer came from M. Durand: he could hardly tell their friends that one was in prison, the other a fugitive, nobody knew where; news which would certainly have given the good Rector sleepless nights in spite of his old port after dinner. He was anxious enough when the declaration of war

set for the present an impassable barrier between France and England; but it never occurred to him that the Revolution itself would lay cruel hands on Betty and Constantine. "They are English: they must be safe," he assured himself. "We must have patience: they will be sent home soon."

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE.

"And a marvellous song we straight did hear,
The snow in the street and the wind on the door.
That slew our sorrow and healed our care.
Minstrels and maids, stand forth on the floor."

Betty was lying awake that Christmas Eve, shivering on the narrow board that served her for a bed. She was still in the small saloon of the Château de Mercy-le-Roy, where she had at first been brought to join the other prisoners on that morning in October. But things had developed a good deal since then, and the Revolutionary Committee of Mercy had made its arrangements. The splendid old house was now a centre of operations; the Committee, with Jean Durand at its head, sat in the great hall and there settled the affairs of the district, examined suspected characters, and generally ordered them into prison till something further could be decided. The provincial executions which spread terror throughout France had not yet begun, and most prisoners of any distinction were sent off to Paris, where their chance of liberty and life was small. These despatches to Paris, however, depended

a good deal on the local authorities, and at present Durand found a certain satisfaction in keeping the whole Mercy family, except the old Comte, who had somehow mysteriously made his escape, mewed up and mortified under his own eye.

A crowd of prisoners of every sort had by this time been lodged in the various rooms of the château. The furniture which had not been burnt was broken up for their service; the cold was great, for the Committee was economical, and it was difficult to warm those large, vault-like rooms. The supply of food was also very niggardly. Betty knew that Baptiste, the jailer, did his best, though out of regard to his own safety he could do very little. But what she cared for more than sufficient food was the fact that when the prisoners were separated into different rooms, a matter in which much careless brutality was often shown, she was left with Madame de Mercy and her daughters in the small saloon. She was glad too for their general comfort, though sorry that Madame de Mercy should be parted from her husband, when the Vicomte, his son and the two Curés were removed to the men's quarter on the other side of the corridor. And she saw Baptiste's influence in the sort of women who were brought by degrees to share this one room — acquaintances of Madame de Mercy's — even those very ladies whom she had seen smiling and playing with their fans that dark night on the terrace at Mercy-le-Comte; and others who were quiet and well-behaved, and bore their imprisonment bravely.

But the confinement was terribly trying, the crowding, the hard little beds, the coarse and scanty food, the absence of all signs of civilisation; it was almost the bitterness of death to these people who had been brought up in luxury. Madame de Mercy complained less than any; but she was very silent and sad, and did not care to join in the talk and the games with which the other ladies, old and young, tried to while away the time and to forget their captivity. Victoire de Mercy entered into all this cheerfully enough. Marie was generally to be seen crouching by her mother's side with her head in her lap; and Betty was never far from the Vicomtesse. The other prisoners would smile as they whispered remarks to each other on the stolid dulness of the English girl.

The dark hours were long in those November and December days, and except the coming of additional prisoners, or the being marched twice a day into an adjoining room, where the coarse meals were roughly spread on a long bare table, there was little to break the monotony. Once or twice one of the jailers came in and read in a loud voice some passages from a Paris newspaper, which were not adapted to cheer the poor prisoners, especially when towards Christmas they heard of the trial of the King. Now and then came a clatter in the passages, a noise of bolts and chains and rough voices talking. Sometimes, if doors were open, they heard the distant shouts of a mob; for the great castle gates stood open to the square, and all citizens might crowd freely through the courtyards and push

their way into the marble-paved hall where dirty Committee-men sprawled in stately old yellow satin *fauteuils* and drank spirits and swaggered about fraternity. Sometimes the revolutionary bands played in the castle court, and Betty shivered with disgust as the well-known notes of the *Marseillaise* fell on her ear, and she heard again the hoarse throats shouting, as she had heard them that morning by the roadside —

> "Allons, enfants de la patrie!
> Le jour de gloire est arrivé!"

and sometimes — it was a pleasanter sound — the wind howled in the trees and moaned round the old towers, and its crying drowned all other noises which might have reached those imprisoned ears.

But Christmas Eve was still and cold. The fire had long since died down, but the room was not dark, for the moon, not very long risen, was shining straight in through the upper part of the high windows that in happier days had opened on the eastern terrace, the old Comte's favourite walk. Now all the lower panes were boarded up, so that the prisoners could see nothing but the sky. The moonlight fell on a number of sleeping faces: just then, indeed, Betty was the only person awake, and she was too cold to sleep. Madame de Mercy had been moving restlessly and coughing, half an hour before, and Betty, creeping from her own bed, had laid Adrienne's cloak, which she still happily possessed, on the top of her friend's thin coverings. She had already given her only blanket without a word

to Victoire, who was crying because her feet were cold. She lay down again and tried to forget present discomfort in the thought of old days at King's Cross, of the happy childhood which was now so very far away, of old Christmas Eves and Christmas Days which had been such times of intense, mysterious happiness to herself and Con, of her mother's talks, of her father's kind jokes, and the presents he gave the children. The old church, the joyfully pealing bells, the dear Rector with his universal charity; it was all a sweet recollection. Betty thought to herself that even then the bells were ringing their Christmas peal, and wondered sadly if Uncle Julius ever gave a thought to her and Constantine. He must know the state of France. The Rector, too! did he never think of his little friends? He would certainly be shocked if he could see her now — and his young poet, Constantine: where was he? That was the one thought which made Betty's throat swell and brought a sudden ache of tears to her eyes: and yet she was not without hope, feeling sure that if the Comte had been taken, she would have heard of it, and knowing that he and Constantine had gone away together.

There in the cold and silence Betty tried to fancy herself in her old bed at home, listening to the Christmas bells. At least, if they were not ringing now, they would strike up directly, for it must be nearly midnight; and shutting her eyes and squeezing her hands together, with an effort to stop the shivering, she tried to persuade herself that being warm or cold was only a

question of fancy; and that if she pretended very hard, as children do, she would be quite as comfortable as if her mother's own hands had tucked her up snugly and drawn the curtains of the little old bed. But these attempts at imagining — not very successful, for Betty was a matter-of-fact person — were broken in upon by a strange little bit of reality. She was not dreaming, for she opened her eyes wide, and immediately pinched herself to make sure. The King's Cross bells were not ringing, but a sound almost as familiar, quite as unexpected, stole to her ear from the moonlit world outside. Somebody, on the terrace, was softly touching a violin; and the tune that he played was *Adeste, fideles.*

Betty did not know it, of course, in the modern translation of "O come, all ye faithful"; but she knew both the Latin words and the old tune intimately well. Her father, who was musical, loved these old tunes, and used to play it on the organ. Constantine had learned it from him and often sang it. Betty remembered how he had sung it to Camille's violin at Christmas, only a year ago; how Camille's father had come in and jeered at him for playing monkish music, and how Madame Durand had defended her son. But Betty had never heard it since, till Camille came, this Christmas Eve, to serenade her in her prison. She lay and listened, and wondered what he meant. If it was intended for any kind of signal, she could not possibly answer it. Perhaps, and this seemed more likely, it was only the young fellow's

kind thought. He knew that all the poor women shut up in that room were Christians, and he knew that the great Christian festival would pass for them without any religious service to mark it off from an ordinary day. Yes, it was meant for them all, Betty assured herself; and after all Camille had a very kind heart; but all the time she realised with an odd uneasiness that it was meant for her, and her alone.

The music did not last long: the tune was played twice through, the second time with slight variations which suited Camille's taste better than Betty's. Then there was silence, and nothing but the still moonlight streaming across the room. Then Betty, whose bed was near a window, was sure that she heard footsteps: somebody was coming up the broad centre steps of the terrace. Then there was something like a sudden rush and a struggle, and she distinctly heard Camille's voice saying in low but furious tones, "Baptiste, you are a traitor!"

Betty sat up on her bed, trembling now with alarm as much as with cold. But she could hear no more, except that after a few moments it seemed that the two men walked away together.

"Betty, are you awake?"

The whispered words came from Madame de Mercy. Betty with glad haste rose from her cold bed, and stepped lightly across the floor to her friend. Madame de Mercy was sitting up too; a ray of moonlight fell on her white face and made it whiter; her beautiful dark eyes looked large and sad; the soft curls of her

hair had escaped from the cap she wore at night, and waved about her thin face and neck. She looked so slender, so delicate, so ethereal, that Betty wondered why the angels did not come down that silver ladder and carry her at once away from earthly prison and pain to a fitter home for any one so spiritual. And yet — what would it all be if she was gone!

Betty sat down on the edge of the bed and took her friend in her arms. Magdeleine's head rested on her broad young shoulder; she kissed her once; and then taking her own cloak which lay there, she wrapped it round them both.

"Now go to sleep," she whispered. "I have got you safe; I will hold you; don't be afraid."

It seemed to her that the Vicomtesse must have been disturbed by those sounds outside; surely, at least, she must have heard Camille's Christmas hymn.

"I have not slept at all," Magdeleine whispered. "Think of its being Christmas Eve. I wanted to wake them all up; for do you know, I thought I heard the angels singing *Adeste*. Of course it was fancy; but at least we might sing it together, as the saints used to sing in prison; and Betty, we might say the Psalm, 'Why do the heathen rage?' I always thought there was an answer to that in the *messe de l'aurore*, 'The people that walked in darkness.' Shall we wake them, dear Betty? If only these cruel men would let M. le Curé come to us early in the morning; but we cannot go even to Bethlehem, we cannot even pray. Where is their good will, these

people — and they were all baptised, I suppose. What shall we do — what shall we do!"

Betty drew her closer, and laid her cheek against the tired brow.

"No," she said, tenderly, but with all her English common-sense, strengthened by the feeling that something strange was going on outside, and that the prisoners had better keep as quiet as they could. "No, madame: let them sleep. When they wake in the morning, they will all remember it is Christmas Day, and they will all be ready to join with you in the Psalm. But I don't think it would be wise to sing now; the jailers would hear us and come. Besides, think of the long night before morning. Sleep yourself, dear madame."

"Then stay beside me, Betty," said the Vicomtesse. "No — what am I saying! Go back to your bed, my poor child; I should never have called you. Were you asleep?"

"No, I was wide awake."

"You are so strong, Betty; you comfort me. Do you know, I so often feel ashamed when I hear my friends talking and laughing, passing the time away as if they were spending a wet afternoon in their own houses. I am glad Victoire can join them; but my heart goes with my little Marie, who feels it all so bitterly and bears it quietly and only wants my hand upon her hair. And oh, Betty, how can I laugh and talk with the others when I think of my Louis with his brave little heart broken by disgraceful ill-treatment; and of Ber-

nard more than all — Bernard, whose one thought was the good of the people, and who consented to every new law which seemed likely to make France happier! Betty, I will confess to you — when I was quite a foolish young girl, when we were first married, I used to be impatient sometimes with my husband — I used to compare him with other men who made more noise in the world; I was even angry sometimes with his philanthropic ideas, because my own father and brothers had none of them, no more than M. de Mercy, you know. But things opened my eyes, and I was not very long in deciding that Bernard de Mercy was the noblest man in France. Sometimes my heart aches when I think of that foolishness, and how Bernard knew all my unworthy thoughts and never resented them — and sometimes I fancy that this separation is my punishment, and that it will last till my death. Yes, I think the happiness of this life is over for me."

"No, no," murmured Betty, caressing her hair.

"Not for him, I hope," she went on softly. "It is impossible that they should do him any real harm, that they should not understand him in the end, a man like him, the truest of his country's friends. Oh, I cannot believe that France has yet descended to such a depth as that. But as for me, this prison is killing me. If freedom ever comes, it will come too late for me."

"Oh, do not say that. Remember Victoire and Marie. You must not leave them."

Betty spoke very quietly: it was impossible to hint at her own pain.

"I do remember them, and I have one comfort," said Madame de Mercy. "It is comfort for myself and confidence for the future. You love me, Betty?"

"With all my heart and strength," said the English girl.

"Then you see, I shall not be alone. Yes, I believe there is only one person who loves me better. I shall have your dear faithful arms to rest in till the end, and then I shall trust my girls to you. I never feel that you are a foreigner, my dear Betty. If all the English are like you, then truly I love them. When I first saw that good brave face of yours — do you remember, one night at home — I felt that there was a heart to be trusted. I was not mistaken. You are my friend, and young as you are, I shall gladly trust you with my children. Poor Victoire and Marie are many years younger than you, Betty. Promise me that you will take care of them, that you will treat them as if they were your own sisters. That promise will be a Christmas gift, and will make me happier."

"I do promise. As I love you, I will be a faithful friend to them."

"Thank you, my dear. I am so tired. By the by, I thought I had not slept, but it must have been in a dream that I heard some one singing *Adeste*."

The talk had wearied her, and she fell peacefully asleep on Betty's shoulder. Presently the girl laid her gently down, covered her with the cloak, and in the freezing stillness of Christmas morning crept back to her own bed.

The sun rose late, but his first red beams fell kindly through the discoloured panes, and were reflected in many prismatic lights by the broken mirrors on the wall — "Christmas candles!" said Marie de Mercy, smiling at her mother. The prisoners were aroused before sunrise by men coming noisily in to light the fire, and bringing bowls of soup with lumps of black bread, the morning meal of the prison. As soon as they had gone away and locked the doors, a chorus of sweet voices rose in a Christmas hymn. The thought of solemn Church festivals so differently spent in the past was in all minds, and even the most frivolous of the women assembled there had tears in their eyes. The singing did not last long, for it was stopped by the thundering of fists upon the door, and a rough voice crying, "Silence."

Betty's thoughts were much occupied all that day with the mysterious noises she had heard in the night, but it seemed as if she was to have no explanation of them. Before night, however, she knew all. The prisoners were marched as usual to their evening meal in a bare cold room lower down the corridor, and returned in darkness only glimmered through by the light of a lantern held by one of their keepers. Madame de Mercy, leaning on Betty's arm, with her Marie clinging to her on the other side, was the last in the sad little procession. They had passed the man with his lantern, and were nearly at the door of the saloon, when a rough hand was laid on Betty's shoulder.

"I have to speak to you, *citoyenne*," said a hoarse

voice in the darkness. "You are suspected — I must question you. Come this way with me."

"I beg you will let me take Madame de Mercy back into the room," answered Betty, while the Vicomtesse for a moment leaned more heavily on her arm. But then, looking up, her manner changed and she withdrew her hand.

"Go, my dear Betty," she said, and in the faintest whisper — "It is Baptiste."

"Ay, you had better come without making a disturbance," said the man, even more roughly than before. "I have no time for waiting on aristocrats."

Little Marie de Mercy, whose horror of the jailer was only deepened by the fact that he had been her grandfather's valet, and who thought he must certainly be one of the wickedest men on earth, quickly slipped her arm round her mother's waist and hurried her after their companions. Betty, puzzled and agitated, though without fear, followed Baptiste down the passage. He took her past several doors, and into a dark little room at the far end. The window was open; a fresh blast of air, delicious in spite of the cold, blew in Betty's face, and she heard the trees rustling outside in the garden. She walked towards the window almost unconsciously, and looked up at the stars. At the same moment she perceived that the window opened on the extreme north end of the terrace, close to a flight of steps leading down into a small grove of yews, which she remembered having passed through when she and Constantine found their way to the château, that July

day so long ago. Away on the terrace, below what were now prison windows, she could hear the tread of a National Guard as he paced to and fro.

"What is it, Baptiste?" she said, turning to the jailer.

"The *citoyenne* can see for herself. There is the open air. I offer her liberty," answered the man, in low and quiet tones.

"Liberty! I don't understand you," murmured Betty.

"Mademoiselle is free," he said. "She will find a friend waiting down there in the shadow of the yews."

"What friend? My brother?"

"No, no, not your brother. I wish it was — brave little hero! But he is away with M. le Comte, and we have no news of them. However, I think that may come before long. I intercepted a bit of paper from an unknown hand that was sent to Lucien — I rather suspect the writer was Remy the Gascon pedlar — mademoiselle may remember him selling knives in the market. The writer asked Lucien to meet him if possible at the chapel of Longuet, on the further edge of the forest; he said he had news for him. I did not report this to the Committee, but slipped Lucien out of prison last night disguised as an old woman. I should have got him clear away, though it was an awful risk, but that rascal of a Camille Durand had the watch on the terrace, and pounced upon us and pulled Lucien's cloak off — a terrible thing for me. You see, mademoiselle, I took this post with the view of being useful

in the right cause, but it is more difficult than I thought. I have to keep up such appearances — the smallest indulgence to the prisoners would make me suspected — I sometimes think that Madame la Vicomtesse must think me the worst of men."

"No, Baptiste; she understands," said Betty. "But why then are you running this risk for me? What can I do outside? And who is this friend" —

Her voice shook a little, and she felt her cheeks flushing in the darkness.

"To tell the truth, mademoiselle," said Baptiste, "I should not have thought of it — but Camille it seems is friendly to you. He let Lucien go — he promised to keep my counsel and never to betray me to his father — I pray for all our sakes that he may keep his word; but he would only do all this on condition that I set you free. He is going to provide a disguise and send you safe away to England. His father has given a *permis*, it seems, for Adrienne and another of the servants to travel to Bec-sur-mer — her sister Pommery is ill. He is going to stop the other woman's going; to hide her, and to send you instead. Do you know, there is a good deal of honesty in that Camille! He deserves a better father."

"That is possible, and I am obliged to him," said Betty very quietly, though she was trembling in every limb. "But if a bird preferred its cage, Baptiste, you would think yourself cruel, would you not, for letting it loose in the forest?"

Baptiste stared hard in the darkness. He certainly

could not understand that any one should choose to stay mewed up in a prison in a strange land, when the world was before them, and home not so very far across the water.

"I suppose one is at liberty to refuse liberty," Betty went on. "For two reasons I choose to remain where I am: one is, that I cannot go back to England without my brother; the other is, that I cannot leave Madame de Mercy. She is ill; she depends on me. Only this morning she asked me to watch over her children. I certainly will not forsake her."

Betty saw dimly in the starlight that the great strong man before her, with his brutal appearance, his red cap, his heavy bunch of keys, went suddenly down on one knee, and she felt a bristly moustache upon her hand. Baptiste the jailer cut a very different figure from Baptiste the valet of the Comte.

"Mademoiselle is heroic," he said. "Do I not know that she is the one comfort of Madame la Vicomtesse! But think, if I do not keep my word with this Camille, who has set his heart on saving her, what will be the consequences to us all? He will denounce me to the Committee; there is an end of me and all I can do for the cause. There will be a new accusation against the prisoners, of conspiring with me against the Republic. Then they are sure to be sent to Paris; and once in those prisons, with heavy accusations hanging over them, what will their chance be? Mademoiselle, I would give my life and all I am worth to keep Monsieur and Madame and their

children in this part of the country. I live in hopes — so does Lucien, so do others who know the people's talk — that before long there will be a rising south of the Loire, which may spread over Anjou, and that the whole of the west of France may rise against these tyrants. In that case, the longer I can hold on here, the longer Monsieur and Madame remain here, the more likely is it that we shall all be saved in the end. I suspect that M. le Comte and mademoiselle's brother have already crossed the Loire — so does Lucien, and we think that Remy may have had a hand in it. But we shall know more soon. Now, after all this, does mademoiselle see how important it is to keep Camille Durand in a good humour? Last night, when he laid hands on me and called me a traitor, I thought all was lost. A moment before I was blessing my good luck, that he was neglecting his watch and amusing himself with his fiddle. All this while I do not seem to consider mademoiselle's own safety — she thinks so little of that herself — but there are times coming when every foreigner will be best out of France."

Baptiste poured out this long speech still kneeling beside Betty, and looking up at the tall young figure outlined against the stars. She was thinking hard, for all that he said seemed terribly true; yet she could neither endure to leave France without Constantine, nor to forsake her friend.

"Then," she said, after a pause, "I understand that Camille Durand is waiting for me down there."

"Yes, mademoiselle; and delay is dangerous. I have already been here too long. The least thing may bring suspicion on me. There is the open window — everything is arranged — if only mademoiselle will descend the steps."

"No, Baptiste; I will stay here — if you will light your lantern — I see you have it there — and call Camille Durand to speak to me."

"Light my lantern! impossible!" cried Baptiste in consternation. "A light shining from this window would bring the guard at once. Why cannot mademoiselle be reasonable?"

He was losing patience, and even muttered something between his teeth about English obstinacy.

"Very well; then I will do without a light," said Betty. "Only call Camille here."

Baptiste was much distressed. He thought this English girl with her fancies and delays would certainly ruin him; it seemed that she had hardly understood all that he had tried to explain to her. But as Betty stood still, quite unmoved by his murmurs of remonstrance, he stepped forward to the window and whistled twice very softly; this was his signal agreed on with Camille, in case any difficulty made it necessary for them to speak with each other. In an instant, springing with two noiseless strides from the shadow of the yews, Camille's tall figure appeared on the threshold of the window.

"What is wrong? what do you want? what is all this delay, you treacherous villain?" he poured out

in angry whispers. "You have played me false, but I will soon punish you. This very night I will denounce you to my father. What have you done with the *citoyenne* Maynard, you double liar? Here have I been waiting half an hour or more"—

"Patience, *citoyen* Camille," said Baptiste. "I have not played you false. The *citoyenne* is here. Ask her if I have not done my part faithfully."

"Oh! are you really there?" exclaimed Camille, with a complete change of tone. "But why this delay, *citoyenne* Betty? Come away with me at once."

Camille behaved well; a slight tremor in his low and eager voice was all that betrayed his joyful agitation at finding himself in Betty's presence once more. He took her hand and bowed over it, touching it with his lips with a courtly and reverent air worthy of any *ci-devant*. Then he drew her gently towards the window, and Betty made no resistance till she stood just within it, where in the light of those winter stars she and Camille could see each other more distinctly. The cold was intense, but she did not feel it; the wind that had risen a little at sunset was going down, and the trees in the garden hardly rustled now. There came over Betty an almost irresistible longing for freedom; it flashed across her that once outside these walls she need not go straight to England, but might disguise herself as a peasant and work her way south till she found Constantine. More than a few great ladies, in those terrible years, saved their lives by lying hidden in peasants' huts, or sitting under a bush in the

meadows or on the heaths, minding cattle. Betty's strong frame and air of solidity was more fitted for such a life than their frail refinement.

But these were only passing thoughts. Madame de Mercy's face soon drove them away, and her sad words, "I shall have your dear faithful arms to rest in till the end." And the promise to take care of Victoire and Marie — was that to be broken as soon as made?

"It is all arranged," said Camille, hastily. "You understand — you are going with Adrienne — and Captain Johns with the *Rose* is expected at Bec next week. You understand, this is all for your sake: I don't ask you to let me go too, Betty."

He drew nearer and whispered very low, so that Baptiste should not hear.

"You are very good," Betty answered. "But I do not want to go."

"Are you mad? Do you know that the longer you stay here, the more dangerous it becomes? Presently I may not have the power to save you. Is it because of Constantine? I will do all I can to find him, and to arrange his escape too."

"I do not know how to explain," said Betty; — this was much more difficult than talking to Baptiste. "I have promised not to leave Madame de Mercy. If you are really my friend, you will let me stay in prison with her, and you — you will not denounce Baptiste to your father."

"Betty!" exclaimed the young man. He groaned, wrung his hands and stamped his foot. "I cannot see

your face," he said. "I cannot tell if you mean this madness. My dear, you may lose your life, and I may not be able to save you. All the prisoners may be sent to Paris — they probably will be. No, I must carry you away to-night. I cannot let you have this fatal way of your own. But you do not mean what you say. Why should your fate be bound up with the fate of these aristocrats? They have done nothing for you. And their imprisonment is just, while yours is the height of unfairness and injury. You do not mean what you say, Betty?"

"I always mean what I say," Betty answered him. "Do you know me no better than that, after all these years? I love the Vicomtesse, and I have promised not to leave her as long as she lives."

"But that will not be long. She is very ill, is she not?"

"Yes. And if — if she dies, I have promised not to forsake Mesdemoiselles Victoire and Marie. They cannot be left in prison alone."

Camille turned away from her and leaned his head against the wall. He muttered to himself, clasping and unclasping his hands. Baptiste groaned in the background and rattled his keys. Betty waited silently.

Presently the young man turned round and said, in low, hurried tones: "I cannot prevent you from sacrificing yourself. You shall do as you please, and I will carry out your wishes, but on one condition. And though you may think hard things of me, it is partly

in your own interest that I make it. One of these days it may give me the power to save you."

"What is the condition?"

"You know," he said, in so faint a whisper that only Betty could hear. "I told you in the vineyard. I will wait — years if necessary — but you will give me your promise."

"I will — I promise," the girl breathed just as low; and then she darted across the room. "There, Baptiste, I am ready. Take me back at once," she said, in a peremptory tone.

"Has mademoiselle settled it, then —" began the jailer in astonishment, at the same time seeing Camille's figure vanish from the window.

"Yes, yes. M. Camille is very good. He will keep our counsel: we are safe with him."

Baptiste was not altogether pleased or easy in his mind; still the English girl inspired confidence, and he led her back without further questioning to the saloon. He unlocked the door and pushed her in with a growl — "There, take care what you say and do, *citoyenne.* I will not denounce you to the Committee this time; but take care, I say."

Some of the other prisoners came forward with anxious faces, and Victoire began asking questions, to which Betty replied gently: — Yes, she had been examined; yes, the jailer had said a good deal, but she had answered him as well as she could, and no further harm, she hoped, would come of it.

Even Madame de Mercy knew no more than this,

though her eyes asked for a fuller confidence. She guessed that in some way the interview had been a trying one from the fiery flush, soon changing to unusual paleness, in Betty's cheeks, and the trembling of her hands as she arranged the pillows. But neither she nor any one else divined the promise that Betty had given as the price of remaining with her.

As for Betty herself — when the immediate glamour of her generous action had passed off, she was strangely oppressed by the dread of a possible future; and when she said her prayers that night, she was beginning to be terribly afraid she had done wrong.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRISON DAYS.

"So, even so, is Life to every soul,
Walled in with barriers that no Love can break."

The English letters arrived at Mercy-le-Roy: first Mr. Lisle's letter, summoning the young people home; then the formal epistle from Mr. Attorney Penn, announcing the death of their respected uncle, and the state in which his affairs were left, to Mr. Constantine and Miss Elizabeth Maynard. M. Durand laughed scornfully over each of these letters. He did not think they needed any answer, now that Betty was imprisoned for ungrateful treason to the country that had sheltered her, and Constantine was gone, no one knew where. He put them away, however, among his other papers, considering the remote possibility of being called to account at some future day.

The second letter had arrived while the Durand family sat at breakfast in the large front room of the Maison Verte. Camille stooped over his plate, flushing deeply; and when he looked up at his mother, his eyes glowed, as her own sometimes did, with a red fire of indignation. But he did not trust himself to speak in

his father's presence. If his father only knew! Camille found it in his heart to wish that he did know, and then shrank from the consequences; for certainly, if the Mayor of Mercy, the Chairman of the Committee, had known all, patriotism would have demanded the sacrifice of his son, and Camille might very shortly have found himself in prison, helpless to defend his betrothed from any danger in the future.

Immediately after breakfast, M. Durand strutted away to his duties. Camille did not follow him at once, as usual, but sat down by the fire, took his violin and played a melancholy air. His mother stood listening as she always listened to his music; it seemed in a moment to soften her hard face, to relax its lines, and to bring to light something of the hidden kindness which few who knew her gave her the credit of possessing.

"And what is that, my little cabbage?" she said with a grim smile, when her boy drew a long dismal cry from his fiddle, and stopped playing. "A dirge for the English uncle, hey? I believe he was a wicked man, that. He only sent those children here to get rid of them."

"Mother," said Camille, laying down the fiddle on his knee and looking at her earnestly, "they have been treated with the most wicked injustice by every one."

"Come, that is your silly fancy," said Madame Durand, her face hardening once more. "Why need the little traitors have thrown themselves into the arms of the enemies of the nation! Betty, at any rate, was

old enough to know what she was doing — old enough indeed for any mischief. She is rightly punished."

"It was all my fault," said Camille. "I have it in my mind to tell my father so. Then I shall be put in prison, and the *citoyenne* will be released."

"What nonsense are you talking?" exclaimed his mother. "You certainly made an ass of yourself; but that was not the reason why she was imprisoned. Besides, your father knew about that. She was imprisoned because she went to Mercy-Citoyen to warn the aristocrats of their danger — and how she came to know of it, we never understood. She must have got the information by some foul means or other."

"She got it through me; I gave her the information," said Camille. "Ah, now you see that I might have a chance of being punished, if my father and the Committee knew all. What joy for Poulain, mother! He hates us already, and so does his wife. What could make him happier than to find treason in the family of Durand!"

"Camille, you are mad!" cried his mother, staring at him wildly. "You do not know what you are saying. Tell me everything this instant."

Camille smiled, and gently touched the strings of his violin.

"I will tell you," he said. "You will not repeat the story, and it will teach you how unjust you have been towards Mademoiselle Betty."

He then went on quietly, and told his mother about the intercepted letters, and how he had given Betty

the one addressed to her, telling her at the same time of the danger that hung over the two Châteaux de Mercy. He reminded her of the meeting in the vineyard, and told her how Betty had refused to listen to him; but he was clever enough to keep the scornfulness of his rejection quite out of sight. Then he went on to describe in his mother's astonished ears how he had planned her escape to England and her journey to Bec with Adrienne, and how she had refused the offered freedom, and had chosen to remain with Madame de Mercy because she was ill and helpless.

"But how did you get at her?" asked Madame Durand, breathlessly.

This was a difficult question, for Camille had no intention of trusting his mother with the secret of Baptiste. He looked down at his violin and smiled wisely.

"We National Guards have opportunities of speaking to the prisoners," he said. "I managed it for myself. So now, mother, when you wish to ruin me and my father and all of us, you have it in your power. But I have something else to say. You see that I mean to watch over the *citoyenne* Betty's safety. Now you must use your influence with my father that neither she nor her friends, for whom she sacrifices herself, may be treated with any injustice or cruelty. My father has great influence at present; he must use it on the side of kindness to the prisoners. If not, I will rescue the *citoyenne* Betty in spite of all the world, and take her away out of this country. Or if I cannot do that,

I will go to the Committee — to Poulain — and denounce myself as a traitor."

"Camille! How wicked you are!" his mother gasped, as soon as she could speak.

"Yes, yes. No doubt I am wicked," said Camille. His eyes shone as he glanced at her, and lifting his violin he began to play the *Marseillaise.*

"For a horrible English girl who is not worthy of you!" groaned Madame Durand.

"For a beautiful and heroic saint who will never love me," murmured her son, under cover of his music.

After the execution of the King, there was some question of taking away the Mercy prisoners to Paris. This course was advised by Poulain, who was dissatisfied with his own position and jealous of Durand's authority. Durand was a prudent man, always on the side of moderation; it was he who had prevented the mob from burning down the château, that night in October; it was he who had given Baptiste Mingot his appointment of head jailer, when in Poulain's private opinion he deserved prison and death for his long service among the aristocrats. When Lucien the steward made his escape on Christmas Eve, though to all appearance he had wrenched out an iron bar and climbed down some ivy, Poulain thought — not quite foolishly — that Baptiste should be made to answer for the safety of his prisoners. He had been careless, if nothing worse. Then any arrangement for the health and comfort of the prisoners, suggested by Durand,

who did not want them to die under his care, being in fact more interested in making money than in taking lives, was growled at and opposed by Poulain. He was a Jacobin, he was of the Mountain, while Durand belonged more to the party of Girondists; and he looked on the aristocrats not as human beings who deserved degradation and punishment and confiscation of their goods, but as poisonous reptiles to be crushed under foot. Thus there was a rivalry between the two men, which every day became more bitter. Durand grew more moderate as Poulain grew more violent. Durand opposed the idea of sending the prisoners to the already crowded prisons of Paris, at first partly because Poulain favoured it; and his party in the Committee and the town being at present the strongest, and his authority as Mayor very secure, he had his own way and they were not sent.

In March the Vendéan war broke out; and it several times happened that the flying columns of peasants swooped upon convoys of prisoners on their way to Paris, and liberated them. They also took several towns, though not actually in the neighbourhood of Mercy — the chief scene of the war being south of the Loire. Every one knows the story of the gallant Henri de la Rochejaquelein and his friends and followers, the heroic little army who sprang from the thickets of their native province to fight for "God and the King." At first their successes were brilliant, and the republican army fell back before them. With the country in this state, with the constant possibility that the

royalist bands would overrun the whole of Anjou, it seemed the most prudent course to prepare for defence, and this was what the Mayor of Mercy did. He barricaded the avenue and threw up walls about the town, and doubled the guards round the château. Being a cautious man, he also reflected on the best way of making his peace, supposing the royalists should finally prove victorious; and this seemed likely enough at one time. He consulted his wife, and she, urged on by the wish to please Camille, as well as to provide for the future and to annoy Poulain, advised him to show some little extra indulgence to the prisoners. For instance, she suggested that he should allow husbands and wives, mothers and sons, to meet and talk now and then; and she reminded him, Camille having impressed this upon her, that the prisoners could not remain healthy if they had no fresh air or exercise.

Baptiste Mingot laughed grimly when the Mayor told him of these new arrangements. He shook his head and prophesied that some one else would slip away like Lucien, and then the citizen Poulain would blame him.

"It is not the affair of the citizen Poulain," replied Durand, with great dignity. "You have my orders — and remember, Baptiste, though I understand your hatred of the aristocrats, they are after all our fellow-creatures. We imprison them for the good of the nation, not to serve our private spite. That would not become philosophers, or lovers of humanity."

"I am neither the one nor the other, Citizen Mayor," replied Baptiste.

"Ah! that is the horrible selfishness of your training. By the by, those orange-trees that used to stand on the terrace of the château — where have they been all the winter? Are they dead?"

"No, Citizen Mayor. They are in the orangery."

"They are of no use here. I shall have them moved to my garden."

"Very well. They are at your service."

After this the Mayor marched Baptiste round into the neglected gardens, and standing on the lower terrace, pointed out to him how easily the two terraces could be divided by a wall with iron spikes from the rest of the garden, and would then make a safe and roomy promenade for the prisoners. The marble statues that used to be their ornament had been thrown down and broken, and the coloured glass in the little temple on the lower terrace was smashed to atoms, but Louis Quatorze, by some oversight, still stood upon his pedestal, and with commanding eyes and nose under the shadow of his great wig looked down upon the world as usual.

After planning his wall, the Mayor walked into the little temple and gave the *Grand Monarque* a blow on the face with his stick.

"This absurd bust had better be removed, Baptiste," he said.

"What is to be done with it?" asked the jailer, stolidly.

His eyes were fixed on the floor, and his heart was burning within him. It seemed as if Durand with his

sharp eyes must see that those marble slabs had been disturbed not very long ago.

"Anything. Break it up; throw it into the river. We will have *Liberté*, *Égalité*, *Fraternité*, painted on the front of this foolish little building. Imagine that the labour of free citizens was employed to build anything so idolatrously ridiculous."

Baptiste laughed. "The citizen Mayor knows how to say clever things. My old master used to admire that bust of Louis Quatorze. He said it was a fine work of art, and valuable. But the Republic does not want art, to be sure."

"Valuable, eh? Well, in some future age, perhaps, as a curiosity. Do not destroy it then. But take it away from here, or the prisoners will worship it. Send it to my house. By the by, it is strange to me that you, who have had the run of the château for so many years, should not know where old Mercy kept his treasure."

"He had a strong room, and I think it was somewhere near the hall, but the door was so hidden that it was difficult to find. And perhaps he did not trust me as far as you imagine," said Baptiste, rather sullenly.

"Ah, that is possible. You could not quite hide the cloven foot, my good fellow," and the Mayor laughed heartily at his own joke.

But at the same time he walked out of the temple and went pacing along the terrace, quite innocent of the fact that the vainly sought and longed for treasures — gold, silver and jewels — were lying safely packed

under the very floor where he had a moment before been standing.

When the Mayor's arrangements were finished, the prisoners were allowed to walk upon the two terraces for an hour in the middle of each day. They could talk and amuse themselves as they pleased, under the eyes of their guards, and with the risk that everything they said might be overheard, and would be reported to the Committee. But even this did not very much interfere with their joy. Their position seemed too evidently hopeless; they had no plots to make, and any scraps of news that reached them from the outer world were seldom good enough to rejoice over; their keepers took care that the crushing news of the King's death should be softened by little or no knowledge of the first Vendéan successes. But the facts of sitting and walking in the sun, of breathing the fresh air, of hearing the birds sing in the garden outside, the distant friendly croak of the frogs in the garden ponds, were in themselves delightful; and then there was the meeting of loving friends and relations long divided.

Betty's eyes were suddenly dimmed with tears when she led out Madame de Mercy on the terrace for the first time, followed by the two girls and poor little Madame Bonne, who was almost worn to a shadow, and spent all her time sighing and groaning. Bernard de Mercy came with long quick steps to meet them; he was very thin and his brown hair was grey, while a look of profound sadness had replaced the old sweetness of his glance and smile.

"Oh, papa!" cried Victoire and Marie, but he had no eyes for them. With murmured words on his lips, "Magdeleine, my dear!" he took his wife in his arms and drew her head to his breast, bending over her and kissing the white, worn brow. Then he turned away from the others, half carrying her, his strong arm wound about her slender figure. Betty stood still and looked. "Papa hardly spoke to us," murmured Marie.

Victoire's lively young eyes were at once attracted by somebody else, who came slowly along, very tall and unnaturally slender, his eyes cast down as if under a weight of unendurable misery, scars still on his face where the stones had wounded it. Poor Louis de Mercy looked as if life had lost all possible interest for him. He kissed his mother's hand as he passed her, then, coming forward, made a formal bow to Betty, and then kissed his sisters on both cheeks, without seeming at all to share the joy with which they flew to meet him. He answered them gently, however, when they began to pour out questions about his days in prison; and presently the three were walking up and down together hand in hand, very much as if they were alone on their grandfather's terrace on some sweet spring day of the old time, and had been allowed to escape while their elders talked in the saloon.

Betty was left to the companionship of Madame Bonne, for the rest of the prisoners, like her own friends, were engaged with fathers, husbands, brothers, old Curés, whom they had not seen for months; and

besides, the English girl, with her entire devotion to Madame de Mercy, was not particularly loved in the prison. Her nation was a barrier to some people, her grave and simple manner to others. Poor little Madame Bonne herself was not very fond of her, perhaps because she was slightly jealous of the Vicomtesse's dependence on her, perhaps because as she said, "Mademoiselle Betty is so severe." But she knew well that the English girl was kind at heart, and she was ready now to lean on her arm and walk with her down the broad steps to the lower terrace, where there were fewer people and the air was fresher, away from the shadow of the great walls.

Madame Bonne was very talkative and full of complaints. It was a serious grievance that she had no relations in prison at Mercy. They lived in Paris, and were most probably in prison too, but the separation was painful. Betty could not persuade her that she ought to be glad that it was still possible to hope a little with regard to the fate of her relations. Then Madame Bonne fell to lamenting over the desolation of the beautiful gardens of Mercy, the broken statues, the trampled turf, and especially the ruin of a certain temple at the door of which they were standing, with its shattered windows and empty pedestal, from which the bust of Louis Quatorze had been removed to a garret in the Maison Verte.

"My dear child, there are two men in there!" cried Madame Bonne suddenly, and she snatched her hand from Betty's arm and hurried away.

Betty was following more slowly, when a voice behind her said, "*Citoyenne*, this way."

She knew the voice of Baptiste, who must not be disobeyed, and might be obeyed without fear, and she turned back at once, stepping over the threshold of the little building.

"Let me bless you, my child; you are a ministering angel to those who suffer," said an old man who stood in the shadow, and Betty saw the old Curé of Mercy-le Comte, the Abbé Gérard, looking at her with those kind eyes which always made her think of the Rector of King's Cross, unlike as the two men were.

Instinctively she knelt down; for Betty had come now to think that differences between Christians were only of this world, and she had long felt that she and her French friends were standing on the threshold of the next. And the news of her uncle's death, which Camille had conveyed, seemed to leave her more utterly forsaken. It was comforting to feel the old priest's hand on her head, and to hear his solemn words of blessing. As she rose to her feet, Baptiste stepped forward and began to speak hurriedly.

"Pardon, M. l'Abbé; but I must go; and before that I wish to say a few words to the English lady. Mademoiselle, there is news from the South. M. le Comte and your brother are safe with the Vendéan army. They are both well, and Lucien has joined them. What will happen next, who knows! but one of these days Mercy may be astonished."

"Oh, thank God! Baptiste, how good you are!" exclaimed Betty.

"And there is another thing, mademoiselle, which M. l'Abbé Gérard thinks that I should tell you, because, though all the rest of us may lose our lives, it is almost impossible that you should. Under the floor of this temple — do you see, at your feet, under these marble slabs — there is a vault which contains all the treasure of M. le Comte — plate, jewellery — all at least that we had time to save before his flight. The place is known to very few. We trust you, mademoiselle, as if you were a member of the family. You will not forget the place."

"It is quite impossible that I should forget it," Betty answered solemnly.

"And now I must go," said Baptiste. "Talk as you will, but do not linger here too long, or the guards will come to separate you."

"Thank you, my good Baptiste," said the Curé. "You are the best, faithfullest, and bravest man in France. But sometimes I tremble" —

"Ha! who is this?" exclaimed Baptiste, with such a sudden change of tone that his companions started. "What eavesdropper have we here? *Citoyenne*, this liberty is allowed to the prisoners at my discretion. If you cannot use it without playing traitor, good-bye to the sun and the fresh air for you."

It was poor little Madame Bonne, who stood shivering with terror on the threshold, but in the midst of her fright began to laugh hysterically.

"Really, Mr. Jailer, as to playing traitor — you must allow for my astonishment at meeting you in a new character, or rather in your old character, is it not? Well, I am relieved, for to tell you the truth, I thought, and so did we all, that your wickedness was more like the wickedness of Judas than any we ever heard of before in France. But now that I hear that you are the best, faithfullest, bravest — and from M. le Curé too — ah, what joy to see you again, dear father!"

"Madame, listen to me," said Baptiste, laying a rather rough grasp on the little woman's arm. "You have learnt a secret not meant for you."

"So it seems," said Madame Bonne, and she began to giggle.

Betty stood looking at her with steadfast dark eyes, which certainly at that moment were severe enough. She was aware, as if by a sudden revelation of her own thoughts, that she had never really liked or trusted Madame Bonne. That prison life brought people's real selves to light in a wonderful manner: it was like the flame of a furnace which separated gold from dross. Many who had been selfish and frivolous in their worldly life became generous and heroic, showing that the selfishness was only skin deep; but all false sentiment was burnt away from those who really loved themselves much better than their neighbours. When Betty first entered the prison she had seen Madame Bonne sobbing over her own hard fate in a corner, while Madame de Mercy, only attended by her frightened

and ignorant children, lay half-dying on the heap of straw. Betty's feeling then, of pity mingled with scorn, had not changed throughout their months of prison; and now she knew by instinct that of all the Mercy prisoners, Madame Bonne was the most unfit to possess a secret which concerned the safety of every one. Self-preservation would be her first law, and if she could purchase her own safety — Then Betty began to reproach herself for these uncharitable thoughts. The poor little woman was nervous, foolish, small-minded, but not wicked, not treacherous. She was now talking to the Abbé Gérard, with tears running down her face, and she seemed fully to understand him when he impressed upon her that the secret of Baptiste's real character and motives must not be breathed to a living soul — not even whispered in the air, in case the birds might carry it to the Committee sitting in the hall, who at present regarded him as the hardest-hearted of their servants.

"Ah! but it means — it means that we shall all be saved in the end" — sobbed Madame Bonne.

"That depends on your discretion, my daughter," said the priest. "I advise you to behave as if you had heard no such good news."

"I would not be too sure, *citoyenne*," growled Baptiste. "It is just as likely to mean that we shall all lose our heads, now that our safety depends on you."

"Ah, my good Baptiste, you do not trust me. But I can hold my tongue, just as well as the *citoyenne* Betty."

"Go, go," said Baptiste, impatiently. "The guards are coming this way, and they must not find you here."

Betty took the little woman's arm and led her away, sobbing and chattering excitedly. She would herself have liked a long and quiet talk with the kind old priest; she could almost have found it in her heart to tell him the whole story of Camille, and to ask his opinion on what she had done; but that was impossible. She had hardly seen Camille since that eventful Christmas evening; now and then she was aware that he was on guard, and once or twice a piece played softly on the violin at midnight, outside the windows, brought her the rather melancholy message of his love and constancy.

April passed, and she knew that the lanes and woods and meadows were starred with cowslips and primroses that no one took the trouble to gather; the banks hung with wreaths of blue periwinkle, the orchards rosy with blossom: May, the most beautiful of months in Anjou, when the golden broom waved everywhere and the country was a wilderness of flowers; wild roses arching the roads, great bushes of honeysuckle scenting the air: June, when the limes flowered sweetly, and the grapes began to grow large in the vineyards, and the hay in the low meadows lay in rich swathes, and though the birds still sang in the morning, and the frogs croaked, they all went to sleep in the heat of the day: July, August, when the heat was wearying and the days were terribly monotonous and long.

No news of the Comte or of Constantine; conflicting

reports from La Vendée; fresh horrors every week in Paris and all over France; but as yet, the Mercy prisoners were left as they were. The strongest began to fail in their confined life which had now lasted nearly a year: even Betty herself grew thin and pale, and her eyes became dark and shadowy. She nursed the sick, she comforted the sad and failing; but most of her time and all her thoughts were given to the dearest and most suffering of all — to Magdeleine, now shaken night and day by a cough that was killing her, and no longer strong enough to walk upon the terrace, even supported by Bernard's arm.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE PRISONER FREE.

"Nothing is sweet, I find, and nothing true,
And none of all my dreams is dear enough —
And only one is worth the dreaming of;
If I could give my life and die for you!"

"PRISONERS! In strict justice there can be no doubt that you all deserve immediate death. But the Republic is merciful, and she may possibly spare the lives of those who" —

The National Representative from Paris paused, and let his eyes wander in a sort of idle curiosity over the crowd of faces turned to him, lighted up as they were by the pale October sunshine that streamed in through the upper panes of the boarded windows.

"You have a terrible number of aristocrats here, Citizen Durand," he said, turning to the Mayor. "Few of those faces look likely to escape the guillotine."

Durand, who was not a savage at heart, hesitated. "Still," he murmured, "surely the Republic does not condemn a man simply for his face!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said the Representative, laughing. "It is a rule with few exceptions that the

face of an aristocrat is not the face of a patriot. There, you see, the thing lies in a nutshell. When I come to question some of these gentlemen and ladies, you will see that I know what I am talking about. One learns a few things, let me tell you, by sitting on a Paris tribunal. One even learns, my good fellow, that pity and softness of heart may be dangerous qualities."

There was something malicious mingled with the amusement in the man's face. As he looked sharply at Durand, the worthy Mayor felt a cold chill of terror to his very bones. It was the intrigues of Poulain which had brought this man here. He had insisted on writing to Paris, asking that a special tribunal, with a guillotine of its own, might be established in the district of Mercy-la-Nation, where the prisoners were crowded and justice was at a standstill, while in other towns the executions were going on merrily. Durand could not refuse to sign this letter: he could not afford to be accused of wishing to spare the Republic's enemies; but in his heart he was sorry. The Mercy family were ruined, and that was enough for him: his life-long spite was satisfied, and philosopher as he might be, he did not wish to have their deaths on his conscience. His wife's and Camille's influence was constant on the side of leniency. He had treated the prisoners indulgently, had several times restrained the renegade brutalities of Baptiste, and was pleased with himself for conduct which, without unnecessary cruelty, had made the Revolution very complete in the neigh-

bourhood of Mercy. He could not quite see the future, or decide in his own mind what was to be done with the unhappy crowd who had now been shut up for a year in the Château de Mercy; but at present he lived from day to day in tolerable cheerfulness — his only torment being the jealousy and the violence of Poulain and the increasing number who were inclined to follow him. When his wife expressed her horror at the idea of the guillotine being set up in the quiet square at Mercy, Durand laughed and said, "What must be, must — After all, the guillotine may rid us of a good deal of embarrassment."

One thing was certain. As long as Poulain followed Paris — and every gazette showed how faithfully he did so — Durand must outwardly go hand in hand with him, or become himself a suspected person. He almost felt as if he was that already, when the National Representative spoke of "pity and softness of heart" with such a horrible smile.

This Representative was a young man, small, slight, and pale, with a soft voice and delicate features. His name was Lézard; he belonged to the extremest party of the Jacobins, and had a devoted admiration for Robespierre. He allowed himself liberties of speech and action, however, which that correct gentleman would hardly have approved; he did not pretend to any religion of any kind; and the night before, on his first arrival at Mercy, he had shocked almost everybody but Poulain by his cruel and mocking description of the execution of Queen Marie Antoinette.

That news, which had reached Mercy a day or two before, had deprived most of the prisoners of any hope that still remained to them. If the Queen was dead, why should they be spared! Some began to think that God had forgotten them, and sank into the blackest despair. Some became desperate in another way; they sang, they danced, they played cards, more eagerly than ever; and then, after a few days of more or less expectation, they were all called together one morning into the saloon, and stood there in a crowd to be inspected by the National Representative from Paris. Nobody had slept much that night, for some of the jailers had not scrupled to tell them what certain strange noises of rumbling and hammering in the square meant: a scaffold was being built; the terrible machine, just arrived, was being set up close to the château gates, and all the country people came crowding in to stare at the great red guillotine, of whose doings in Paris they had heard so much. The soldiers ordered them off, threatening to cut off the head of the first person who came too near. On this the crowd retired to a respectful distance; but there it went on increasing, and by morning the square was packed with people from country and town, struggling for the best places to see the frightful spectacle that was promised them.

It is to the credit of the French provincial towns, by the by, that after a time their inhabitants became so weary and sick of these cruel sights that all prisoners had to be sent to Paris, where, before the end of the

Terror, people had grown hardened to such things, and the carts on their way to the guillotine had become one of the ordinary sights of the streets.

The citizen Lézard, mounted on a stool, wearing a hat with tricolor plumes, and with both hands thrust into the pockets of his long coat, looked such a boyish figure that it was not easy to believe in his power of life and death over the helpless flock of men and women that stood before him. His first words, too, were almost reassuring, and hope dawned in some pale and stricken faces when he paused, with a smile on his lips, after speaking of the Republic's mercifulness, and stooped to hold his short and low-voiced conversation with the Mayor. Only those who stood nearest caught a few words of what he said; but they all heard and saw him laugh. As for the Mayor's face, that told them nothing. He looked uncomfortable, certainly; but then he was most likely jealous of the other man's authority. He could not strut and bounce and bluster quite so much in the Representative's presence. Poulain, on the other side, had a broad and savage grin on his hideous red face. Nobody could bear to look at him, or at the low and cruel faces that crowded behind him; the prisoners turned their eyes away. Most of them, too, bestowed no more than a glance of disgust on Baptiste the jailer, who looked dark and gloomy as he stood in the doorway with the great bunch of keys at his belt.

The prisoners themselves, even those who had borne their captivity most bravely, looked pale, worn, and

miserable; their clothes were old and shabby; most of the women, on that chilly autumn morning, had wrapped their heads in scarves of old black lace or wool, while the men stood bareheaded. Families had been allowed to draw together, and the crowd was as far as possible divided into groups. Nearest the door of the saloon stood the Vicomte de Mercy, his face set in a kind of stony gravity, very upright, very dignified, with something of the stateliness that might have belonged to his noble old father, the owner of the house. His two daughters clung to him, one on each side, Marie leaning her head against his arm, while Victoire stared with wide eyes at the Paris Representative, and sometimes looked up for sympathy to her tall brother Louis, who stood on her right with his head bent and his arms folded, a picture of mingled despair and scorn. On the other side, near Marie, Betty Maynard stood alone. Behind her, Madame Bonne trembled and wrung her hands unceasingly; and Jacqueline was not far off, having pressed up to Betty with a word of enquiry for her dying mistress, who had been lately removed to another room, and who was the only prisoner not present in the saloon that morning. The old Curé of Mercy-le-Comte, his hands clasped, his lips moving in prayer, stood close behind the Vicomte de Mercy, and close by him was Robert, the honest steward. A few yards away, the tall and stern-faced Curé of Mercy-le-Roy headed a little group of his best parishioners. There were other family groups farther down the room: parents and children supporting each

other, and surrounded by their faithful servants. Other deprived priests were scattered here and there, and in one corner a little party of nuns from a neighbouring convent, who had refused to give up their religion or return to the world, stood crowded together, waiting their fate like the rest at the hands of Representative Lézard. These good women had not long been brought to the château, where they had spent their days and nights in nursing the old and sick and comforting the sorrowful.

"Understand, prisoners," the Representative began again with an agreeable air, "that you cannot deceive me by pretending to be good citizens. Experience — and some little natural talent, perhaps — has taught me to read faces, and it appears to me that almost every countenance here bears the poisonous stamp of aristocracy."

He paused, that this thrust might take effect. One or two of the prisoners smiled, and Louis de Mercy went so far as to mutter, "How can a stamp be poisonous!" Fortunately no one but Victoire heard him. At the same moment Madame Bonne groaned behind Betty, "Heaven knows that I am not an aristocrat."

"Peace, peace, *citoyenne:* nobody suspects you of such a crime as that," whispered the impertinent tongue of Jacqueline close to her shoulder.

"Silence among the prisoners!" Baptiste growled, bringing down his pike with a ringing thump on the floor. "The citizen Representative has more to say."

M. Lézard took his right hand out of his pocket

and waved it majestically. "It is the Republic's last wish to condemn the innocent," he said, raising his voice. "She is never unjust; but her servants know by bitter experience how few are innocent. There is one way, however, by which even the blackest stains of aristocracy, the deepest dye of sympathy with a hateful cause, *may* be washed away and forgiven: I do not say *will* be, as all the circumstances of the case must be carefully considered, and sins of actual resistance, of active treason against the Republic, are in their nature unpardonable. But any prisoner, male or female, who is prepared to assist the officials of the Republic by denouncing to the tribunal a worse criminal than himself, or by bearing important witness against a fellow-prisoner, will be considered so far patriotic; and if his or her own crimes can be pardoned without danger, may hope for life and liberty."

M. Lézard spoke slowly and distinctly, so that it was impossible for the prisoners to misunderstand him. When he stopped, there was a dead silence; and once more his eyes travelled slowly and consideringly over the varied crowd of faces before him. Most of them were in a strong light; the sunbeams that fell across the room were reflected in the starred and broken mirrors on the wall, which flashed them back, so that the scene was doubly illuminated.

"Well, prisoners, where are your manners?" grunted Poulain, suddenly. "To begin with, has no one a word of thanks for the citizen Representative?"

Lézard's own eyes, having inspected the room, had

now rested on the face of the Vicomte de Mercy. He and his little group stood in a broad ray of sunshine. Betty looked up at him, and saw that his gaze met that of Lézard with a calm and stern stateliness which, but for a very natural mixture of splendid scorn, might have suited any old-time martyr for Christianity. The old Comte de Mercy would have been satisfied with his son then: the three children's faces caught something of the same expression as they looked at their father. If any one among the prisoners must answer Lézard's insulting words, it was of course the Vicomte de Mercy. After a moment he spoke in a quiet, clear voice, still looking straight at the Representative.

"For my fellow-prisoners and myself I need only say, citizen, that if Republican justice finds us worthy of death, we are ready to die. As to your announcement of the conditions of pardon, from honourable men and women it requires no answer."

"What is that man's name?" asked the Representative, turning to Durand, who became a little pale as he replied, "It is Bernard Mercy, *ci-devant* noble, of this place."

"Let him come up first for trial. Such a fine spirit ought to be relieved from the burden of earth as soon as possible."

Saying this, the National Representative descended from his stool and walked out of the saloon, followed by the worthies of Mercy.

Two or three weeks before this, partly for her own sake, partly for that of the other prisoners, Madame de

Mercy had been removed from the saloon to a small room in one of the upper corridors, where Betty Maynard had also been installed as her nurse and guardian. Always slight and delicate, the Vicomtesse was now wasted away almost to nothing: she was in the last stage of the disease that had laid hold upon her more than a year ago, and those who saw her expected that one of the fits of coughing from which she now constantly suffered must certainly bring the end. Baptiste would have done anything he could for her; but it was impossible to give her any greater indulgence than a separate room, a tolerable bed, and occasional visits from the Mercy doctor — a humble little apothecary whom the Revolution had not yet seized, though he perilled his head by his respectful manners towards Madame la Vicomtesse, as he persisted in calling her who was now known as "the woman Mercy."

In the corner of Madame de Mercy's room there was a second bed, very hard and narrow, with a blanket and some straw. Baptiste asked the Vicomte privately who should be there, and Bernard said at once that if the young English lady would attend his poor wife, he could wish for nothing better. It was true that Betty had never learnt nursing; but love teaches most things: she was clever and strong, and Magdeleine trusted herself without fear to the touch of those tender hands. Neither her own daughters nor her servants could have waited upon her as Betty did. And Betty, though remaining faithful to her own Church, was able to supply much of the religious com-

fort this poor soul longed for. The Curé was not allowed to visit her; that was considered too great an indulgence. The young English girl prayed night and morning by her side, repeated psalms and hymns when she was strong enough to listen, answered her faint questions discreetly, and did her very best to brighten and smooth the road through the dark and rough valley on which Magdeleine had already entered.

Betty had been fetched down from her charge that morning, to stand with the other prisoners during the inspection by the National Representative. When it was over, when the dead and horrified silence that succeeded M. Lézard's departure was beginning to be broken by cries and exclamations, as the prisoners realised vividly for the first time the awful hopelessness of their position, she suddenly found that the Vicomte was talking to her. He was still holding his two girls by each hand: his face, his smile, were as calm and sweet as ever.

"Betty, a favour!" he said in a low voice. "Tell my wife nothing of this. If it is possible, I shall see her once more, but I will not have her know that it is farewell."

"She shall not — but when?"

"When will the end be? Not till to-morrow morning, I fancy. One thing more, Betty. Take this," and under cover of the little group standing round he pressed into her hand a small leather case that she remembered. "It will be safer with you than with the children," he said, "for I cannot think that these

demons will dare to hurt you. If you see my father again, give it to him, and tell him that his son did him no discredit at least in the manner of his death. God bless you, noble girl! Do not let my wife know" —

Betty's eyes were swimming with tears. She hardly saw that the Vicomte was pushed on one side, but she felt a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"None of your plotting," said the rough voice of Baptiste. "Go back to your work, *citoyenne*, you have no business here."

Betty went without another word, while two or three of the ladies, old friends of the Vicomte's, hurried up to speak to him before the prisoners were again separated.

She knew her way well. She hurried along the corridor till she came to a door at the foot of a narrow winding staircase, kept by a National Guard. He silently unlocked it: she passed through, and climbed up thirty or forty steep steps, till she came to another door on which she knocked twice. The staircase went climbing on past this door towards the roof of the château. It was also opened, and Betty stepped out into a long and low arched corridor, with a bare brick floor, with deep windows at intervals strongly barred. A few pictures still hung here and there on the red wall, others had been dashed to pieces on the floor, and the guards had scribbled rhymes and caricatures with chalk on the wall. The whole place looked like a prison. Betty was hurrying towards her friend's room, a few yards along this corridor, when the National Guard who was on duty, and had unlocked the door,

caught her by the sleeve and stopped her. She turned round, starting and flushing violently at the sight of Camille Durand. He was seldom long out of her thoughts, being a subject of trouble and anxiety, but it was long since she had seen him alone or spoken to him, for he was not often on guard inside the château.

"Do not stop me, pray!" said Betty, hastily. "I must go back to Madame de Mercy."

"She has not been coughing," Camille answered with great gentleness. "I listened at the door several times, and all was still. I think she must be asleep. Look; I have brought her this."

From a dark corner behind him he produced a small basket of grapes, daintily arranged with vine-leaves. "Sick people like these, do they not?" he said.

"Oh, Camille, how good you are!" exclaimed the girl, almost in spite of herself. "Only yesterday she was saying that she would like some grapes, but I did not know how to get them. But it was dangerous for you!"

"No," said Camille, looking down and smiling. "In fact, my mother sent them." Then he raised his eyes half shyly, and while Betty took the basket from his hand, he said, "Mademoiselle Betty, do you know that you are more beautiful than ever?"

"You should not say things that are not true," Betty answered. "I never was beautiful, and never shall be."

"In my eyes you are, always were, and always will be."

"Thank you; but if you cannot say anything wiser than that, I must go away at once." Betty almost laughed as she spoke; but then, suddenly remembering the terrible scene downstairs, she caught her breath and turned pale. "I have come from the saloon," she went on, in an awe-struck whisper. "Oh, that National Representative! He looks so young and gentle, but I do believe he is the very wickedest man in the world. If you could have heard how he tried to cheat the poor prisoners! Did you know that the trials are to begin to-morrow morning, and now M. le Vicomte is to be tried first! And then! You see, he made the Representative angry."

"What happened? Tell me all!" murmured Camille.

He drew Betty a little further along the corridor, and made her sit down in one of the deep white window-seats, leaning himself against the wall beside her. Poor Camille, at that moment he was almost happy.

Betty felt that it was right to tell him all she knew, for he was her one powerful friend outside the prison, and since his offer of liberty on that Christmas night she had always known that somehow, though perhaps in some odious way, if safety was ever to come, it would come through him. She therefore began, and told her story in low tones, careful not to disturb the Vicomtesse, near whose door she was sitting. She had paused to listen, and all was still; the painful cough could generally be heard for some yards along the corridor.

Camille listened with the gravest attention, but with

a glow in his dark eyes, to Betty's story, which she told in the rather slow, direct manner that was usual with her. If he was thinking more of Betty than of her story, more of her presence near him than of any horrors that might come to pass the next day, his state of mind was very pardonable.

Perhaps only a loving heart like his would have thought Betty beautiful; but she had grown into a noble-looking girl, her looks and manner refined by suffering, and by intercourse with a woman so high-bred as Magdeleine de Mercy. In figure she had grown both taller and slighter, had lost solidity, and gained grace. The thinness of her face made her eyes larger and darker; the long strain of anxiety for herself, her friends, and the dear young brother she hardly expected to see again, gave them a softened and pathetic look. Even her voice was gentler, her tones and expressions less abrupt. And yet with all this she was the old Betty still; true as steel, grave, steady, not given to imaginations—an English girl of the best, if not the cleverest kind. Though poor Camille might not see it, however, every day removed her farther from him.

"What a reptile!" he muttered, when Betty stopped, having repeated the Representative's last words. "How can my father bear with such a man! It is not his doing, however; we have to thank Poulain for all this. Well, I knew how it would be; and if this Lézard knew everything, it is my head, not Bernard Mercy's, that ought to fall first. I am a worse

traitor to the Republic than he ever was, or is likely to be."

"Because of your goodness to me, Camille?"

"No, Betty. Shall I tell you? Yes, you shall know the worst of me. Only I begin to fear that the plan will fail, or will succeed too late to save many innocent lives. Baptiste and I agreed that you should know nothing, because disappointment was so terribly likely. It would have been too hard to raise false hopes — and perhaps I am wrong now!"

"No, no; tell me, and quickly, please. I must go back to Madame de Mercy."

"Have patience and listen to me: she is asleep," said Camille. He took Betty's hand and held it between his own, which were as cold as ice. "I will not delay you with particulars," he said, "but Baptiste, as you know, has at times had secret communications with the leaders of the Vendéans. Yes, and more than you know, for he has not dared even to tell you; too much depended on it. Not long ago he heard that they were planning a march to Granville, which would bring them through this country: they must pass not many leagues from Mercy. When he knew that Poulain had insisted on writing to Paris, and that the danger of the prisoners here was becoming very great, he made up his mind to consult me — for though our good Baptiste does not know all, Betty, he has long suspected that my heart is imprisoned in the château — yes, a more strongly bound and yet a happier captive than any other here! Well, to cut it

short, we sent a messenger a few days ago to let the Vendéan chiefs know of the great danger here, and considering that the old Comte and Constantine are with them, and knowing by report what a brave and chivalrous man they have there in the citizen La Rochejaquelein, why, it will be strange if no rescue is attempted. But when will it come, and how are we to gain time in the meanwhile?"

Betty had listened breathlessly. At the end she sighed: "Oh, this is more terrible than ever! I almost wish you had not told me. If they do not come to-night, it is hopeless, for there is no way of gaining time."

Camille knelt down on the floor at her feet. "Listen, Betty," he whispered, "I have thought of a way to save you, at least. You will be angry, perhaps, but I do believe the idea came to me straight from that guardian angel you used to talk about. Listen, my dear. Life is worth nothing now to me; I hate France, I hate all my relations, my music, everything. I have not forgotten that promise of yours, but I have not lived through these nine months without coming to know that I might as well think of marrying a star, 'a bright particular star'—you remember Con and his Shakspeare, Betty. Yes, I have learnt how far you are above me. And now I see, when you are brought to trial, how you can save yourself. You can denounce me as a traitor to the Republic, my dear. It is perfectly true. I am a traitor to the Republic. And the greatest kindness you can do me, Betty, is to let

me give my life for you. Think — if Constantine comes here too late, and finds that you — *you* — are dead!"

For a minute there was intense stillness in the corridor; then Betty broke it oddly with a little laugh. At the same time the tears ran suddenly down her face; she stooped forward, laid her hand on Camille's thick red locks, and gave him one quick kiss on the forehead. The young fellow knelt perfectly still; but he flushed deep red, and his eyes shone with joy as if all the happiness in the world had been showered at once upon him.

"You want to make me unworthy of you then, Camille," said Betty. "You want to give me something for Constantine and me to be ashamed of all our lives. You did not think what you were saying, or it was certainly not my guardian angel who put such a thought as that into your head. A life saved like that would not be worth having at all."

The words sounded hard and severe, even ungrateful, but the sweetness of Betty's look and manner took all their sting away. She rose up with a sort of gentle dignity, saying, "We are in God's hands, you know, and if it is His will that we should be saved, why, saved we shall be. And if not, it is only a short and painful way to heaven."

Camille said no more. He took the key of Madame de Mercy's room, and walked before Betty to unlock and unbar the door, as was the duty of the man on guard there. Then he stood back for her to go in, and

waited a moment, half unconsciously, to know that all was well.

A low cry from Betty, however, made him stride forward into the room. Madame de Mercy lay as if asleep; her thin white hands clasped outside the coarse sheets; her head thrown back on the low pillow, over which her soft grey hair lay curling wildly; her eyes closed. Her pale lips were slightly parted in the most peaceful, most heavenly smile that Betty had ever seen. She had suffered enough, and Bernard need fear no more trouble for his gentle wife in this world. She was at rest.

Betty knew that no happier end could have been possible for the friend she had loved and tended so long; but her first feelings were those of terrible loneliness and bitter self-reproach, as she threw herself down in a passion of tears beside the bed, and kissed the cold hands that could give no answering caress any more. Even the thought of all Magdeleine had escaped was not strong enough to comfort her.

"I ought to have been here! why was I not here! She said she would die in my arms."

At that moment all personal danger, all hope of rescue, all the tragic circumstances that surrounded her, were matters of total indifference to the girl who lay there mourning for her dead friend. Camille, after standing by for a few minutes in awe-struck sympathy, locked her into the room as in duty bound, and went away to inform the head jailer of what had happened.

Gradually, in that peaceful presence, in the stillness

of the small, cold room, Betty grew calmer, and there came into her mind words that Magdeleine's own sweet voice had repeated to her softly, long ago in a thunder-storm —

"He brought them out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death: and brake their bonds in sunder.

"O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness: and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men!"

CHAPTER XX.

REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE.

"And now the mustering rooks innumerable
Together sail and soar,
While for the day's death, like a tolling knell,
Unto the heart they seem to cry, Farewell,
No more, farewell, no more!"

Baptiste the jailer came up with his men, gave a few rough orders, and then took Betty by the arm and led her away in silence. She was most unwilling to leave her friend, but made no useless resistance. Baptiste had snatched up the basket of grapes from the floor where Betty had dropped it, and as they descended the stairs he thrust it through the bars of a loop-hole window and let it fall on the stones of a small court below.

"That Camille does his best to ruin us all!" he muttered between his teeth.

"No, no, he is good!" exclaimed Betty, eagerly. "Oh, Baptiste, it breaks my heart that she has died alone. I promised her to ask you to let M. le Curé come at the last, and then she thought you would see that she had Christian burial. Is that impossible now?"

The jailer stopped and passed his hand over his eyes.

"*Citoyenne*, I do not know — I must think," he said. "We are all in awful danger. I doubt if any of us will be alive to-morrow night; at least, they say that the guillotine in Paris accounts for its hundreds each day. And that little Representative is a wild cat for fury, and there are all his fellows about the town. Christian burial for Madame: how is it to be! After all, when a pure angel spirit like hers returns to its Maker, is He likely to ask what words were said when she left this world? No, the first thought will be to comfort her after her martyrdom — for that it has been, dear blessed soul!"

"Of course, of course, I know all that," said Betty, hastily. "It is more for the sake of M. le Vicomte and the children, Baptiste. Can you manage nothing? After all, you are not suspected; you have plenty of power. You are not in danger like the rest of us, surely? Besides," she added in a whisper, with a quick glance, "there is hope for us all — the Vendéans are coming."

"Who told you that?"

"Camille."

"Is Camille mad?"

"No," said Betty, her colour deepening; "but he knows who can be trusted."

"Ah, pardon, *citoyenne!* but that is a secret which I would not have whispered to the stone walls. However, as you know it, hope a little if you please, my

poor young lady. As for me — well, miracles have happened, therefore this may happen: that is all I can say. But I do not expect to live to see it."

"Why not? you are in no danger."

"Did you see the face of the little *citoyenne* Bonne, when that Lézard offered life to any prisoner who would denounce his neighbours?"

"No. Oh, Baptiste, impossible!"

"She looked at me. There is nothing that some people would not give for life, you know. And ever since the discovery she made last spring, I have known that my safety hung on a rotten cord."

"Impossible!" Betty repeated.

But they had come to the last turn in the stairs; the lower door was unfastened with a great noise, and Betty passed through once more into the cold stone passage below. Forgetting for a moment the guard who stood there, she looked up at Baptiste and said, "Oh, Baptiste, who is to tell her husband and children?"

The jailer's face had changed in a moment: he answered her very roughly and with a savage grin. "Don't derange yourself, *citoyenne;* the Republic will see to all that. Say what you please to the young girls, only do not let them squall too much, for the sake of the other prisoners."

"What has happened?" asked the soldier who stood there.

"The woman Mercy is dead," Baptiste replied shortly.

"In good time for herself," observed the other. "Sick or well, she is happier out of the hands of Lézard."

"Take care what you say, my friend," answered Baptiste, with a grim laugh. "Representatives have long ears, and if he suspects you of sympathy with *ci-devants*" — he clicked his fingers meaningly.

"Me!" cried the horrified soldier.

But Betty waited to hear no more. She hurried along the passage, passing several men who took no notice of her, and was admitted by the guard into the saloon. Here she was received in silence, for the news of Madame de Mercy's death had already spread through the prison. But in a moment, as she stood within the door, a sound of moaning from a far corner fell upon her ears, and then Victoire de Mercy came flying along the room and threw her arms round her neck with a burst of tears and sobs.

"Oh, Betty, is it true? is mamma really dead? What shall we do! Come, please come and comfort Marie, for she won't let any one touch her or speak to her. She slapped Bonne's face just now."

Then Madame Bonne herself came up, very pale and trembling.

"Ah," she said, "my life in this prison has been one of pain and insult from beginning to end. And I must say that it is the *citoyenne* Maynard to whom I owe all this misery. She took my place with the dear Vicomtesse, who in former days could do nothing without her faithful Bonne. It is I, alas, not a foreign stran-

ger, who should have waited on her dying bed. And now, not satisfied with this, the *citoyenne* has poisoned against me the minds of my dear Victoire and Marie, my children from infancy. Imagine! I try to comfort Marie under the greatest grief she has known, and she strikes me on the face. This is all your doing, detestable Englishwoman!"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed Victoire. "What are you saying! It is not Betty's doing. Poor little Marie was out of herself with misery. She will be better soon, and will apologise to you. Oh, Bonne, how can you be so unjust!"

"Ah! I told you so. There it is again," said Madame Bonne, beginning to sob, and she walked off to the other side of the room, followed by some pitying looks from the other prisoners, who did not altogether love Betty.

Betty herself, with Baptiste's words fresh in her mind, glanced after her in real alarm that she did not dare to show. She would have followed her, and tried to make peace; but she perceived at once that this would be useless, and would only encourage the little woman in her selfish complaints. She therefore said nothing, but taking Victoire by the hand, walked with her along the room to the corner where Marie lay sobbing on her bed. Betty sat down there and lifted the small, slight girl into her arms.

"My dear, my dear," she whispered, "if you could see the smile on her face! All her pain is over now and forgotten."

"But she can't be quite, quite happy, leaving us behind in this dreadful, cruel place!" sighed the child.

"Yes, she is," said Betty, firmly. "She sees that our Father is watching over us all, and she knows, dear child, that we shall not have long to wait, that joy will come in the morning."

Victoire de Mercy, who was with all her thoughtlessness a bright and clever girl, said afterwards that Betty's talk at that time had seemed to her almost unreal and exaggerated. This struck her so much that she did not feel comforted, as Marie did, but felt even a little scornful as her sister's sobs ceased under those soothing, hopeful words. It seemed to Victoire that no amount of religious faith could alter the fact of their terrible position; themselves and their whole family victims of the most cruel injustice, captives in danger of a barbarous death. If the joy Betty talked of lay only on the other side of an awful agony, Victoire felt that she could hardly pretend to realise or to rejoice in it. It was all very well to be brave, but one could not, under such circumstances, be expected to be happy. But afterwards she understood her friend better, and knew that Betty's usual good sense and honesty had not deserted her even then; that there was indeed nothing visionary in her belief that joy would come in the morning; that she had only put into words her firm inward confidence of safety.

For the present, the fate of the prisoners seemed only too certain. The citizen Lézard was full of energy: as

soon as the work at Mercy was satisfactorily finished by the death of a fair number of aristocrats and other evil-disposed persons, he meant to start off on the same patriotic business to other towns further west. In order to lose no time, therefore, he ordered that the first Mercy trials should take place that very afternoon. And according to his expressed wish, the first prisoner to be brought before him was the *ci-devant* Vicomte de Mercy. A few other prisoners, whose trials were to follow immediately on his, were marched into the old minstrels' gallery at the lower end of the hall, and kept there guarded while his examination was going on, perhaps as a warning of what lay before them. The choice of these people seemed to have been made at haphazard; no one understood why certain prisoners in a room were taken and others left. Betty did not see Baptiste anywhere while these arrangements were being made; one of the other jailers came in with a few gendarmes, and read a list of names from a dirty paper in his hand. Afterwards she thought that Poulain was perhaps responsible for these lists.

Anyhow, she was roughly separated from the two young girls, who clung to her with tears, and had to follow a string of other prisoners along the corridor and up a short broad staircase and through folding doors into the gallery. As they approached the foot of the stairs there was a pause, however, and she saw Madame Bonne in front of her, talking to the jailer in a state of extreme excitement. The man burst into

a laugh and said, "Come along this way then, *citoyenne*," and led her off along the passage.

"What are they going to do to that poor silly little woman?" said somebody, in Betty's ear; but she hardly heard and did not answer: she was touched with a thrill of terror, remembering what Baptiste had said an hour or two before.

When they got into the gallery a few men were already there, some standing, some crouching down in front, leaning their heads against the gilded balustrade, through and over which they looked down into the hall. The guards contented themselves with keeping the gallery doors, and allowed the prisoners, out of whom all spirit seemed crushed, to mingle and to talk in whispers as they pleased. Evening was coming on; it was almost dark; there were no lights in the gallery, and they could hardly see each other's faces. Betty stood gazing with bewildered eyes into the great vaulted twilight space of the hall, where people were tramping about, chairs scraping on the once beautiful floor, rows of flaring candles being lighted, lanterns swinging here and there. The vagueness of the whole scene made it still more like a frightful dream: and this was how those who escaped the judgment of that tribunal would all their lives remember it.

"Do you see my father?" said an abrupt voice close by.

Betty started, and perceived that Louis de Mercy was standing beside her.

"No; where is he?" she said.

"Lean a little forward. There: you see that barricade across the hall, near the foot of the table. There he stands with guards on each side, waiting till those *canaille*, the judges, are pleased to begin. We shall all stand there in our turn, I suppose. I wished to stand beside him, to be tried with him, to be sentenced with him, to die with him; but those privileges were too great for me. Where are Victoire and Marie? why are they not here?"

"I cannot tell. I was separated from them," Betty said. "But I am glad they are not here."

"What does it matter!" said the young man, and he laughed. Then in a softer voice he said, "Were you with my mother when she died?"

"No," Betty answered, the tears rushing to her eyes. "When I got back they said she had been dead an hour. She was alone — but do not grieve for her. She was smiling like a happy spirit suddenly set free."

"Grieve? No, I rejoice. When my father heard it, he said, 'Thank God. Now I can die like a man.' Mademoiselle" — he paused.

"Hush! take care," murmured Betty.

"I wish to say that I regret my bad manners to you. I have never forgotten how I received you at Mercy-le-Comte, a year ago. Your devotion to my mother, your goodness to us all, your noble bearing throughout this terrible time — well, the past year has taught me a hundred lessons, and I beg you, mademoiselle, to forget the past and to include me henceforth in your esteem of the family."

"I assure you," said Betty, earnestly, "I have never for one moment resented" —

"Well, give me your hand," he said, impatiently.

She instantly placed it in his; he bent his proud young head and touched it with his lips.

"Death is near to us all," he said, "and we may as well leave this world with friendly hearts."

"Silence among the prisoners!" shouted a hoarse voice from the door. Louis dropped Betty's hand and retreated a step or two from her side; but while most of the others sat or crouched down in the gallery, he and she both remained standing — tall, upright young figures, seemingly fearless of what fate might be in store for them, their whole attention fixed on the trial which was now about to begin.

Betty would gladly, at that moment, have confided to Louis de Mercy the distant chance of safety which still kept her from despair; but at the same time she knew that this would have been a great risk; he was a rash young man, and might have ruined all by some desperate attempt at escape before the possible rescue was anywhere within reach. No, it was better to keep the secret; but her own courage and calmness were much helped by the thought, "If Con and M. le Comte are really with them, we shall be saved."

The hall was now lighted up more brightly, though a last glimmer of afternoon sun still shone in through the thick-paned old windows, deep set in the western wall. It was a strange, wild scene. The old yellow satin armchairs of the château, though torn and defaced

and their gilding tarnished, made very stately seats for the judges who sat round the end of a large table: the National Representative in the middle, as President of the tribunal, wearing his hat with tricolor plumes, the Mayor of Mercy with his tricolor scarf of office, Poulain the blacksmith dressed as a plain republican in coarse clothes, with a red cap stuck on one side of his head, and his black, begrimed hands busy with a heap of papers. The other men who sat there were people of more or less importance in the district, and followed Poulain's lead in the matters of dress and behaviour generally. There were bottles and glasses on the table for the refreshment of these worthy judges, and one or two of them seemed already half asleep, lounging on their elbows. Lézard's face bore a look of indifference, with a mixture of malicious mockery; Poulain's had an expression of violent and triumphant hatred; the Mayor alone looked anxious and unhappy, though he agreed readily and rather noisily to everything suggested by the authority from Paris.

Behind these men stood groups of gendarmes and of National Guards, with a few extremely rough and brutal-looking men in red caps and *carmagnoles*, who had come from Paris with Lézard. All round the hall, pressing in at the doors, kept back with some difficulty by the soldiers from crowding up to the table itself, was the populace of Mercy and the neighbourhood — men, women and children, some angry and delighted, a few sympathetic, many only curious, eagerly pushing to share in the excitement of seeing

the Vicomte de Mercy tried for his life in his father's own hall.

Bernard stood alone, quietly unmoved, facing all this assembly. He was very pale; but his brow was calm and placid as ever; his eyes were steady and grave; and in addition to his former look of goodness and humanity, he had gained something of that supreme air of distinction which people used sometimes to miss in his father's son. There was not the smallest tremor in the voice that answered Lézard's first questions: his name, his age, his wife's name, the number of their family, the description of their fortune and estates. Then Poulain, acting as Public Prosecutor, stumbled through a written paper which accused him of being an aristocrat and an enemy of the nation, and of having attempted to emigrate with his family, rather than submit himself to the laws of the Republic, one and indivisible.

"I am not an enemy of the nation," he answered. "I was among those in the States-General who were most forward in asking for reform. I gave up my seignorial rights before I was asked to do so, and it was always my endeavour to do justice among the people. The peasants of my father's estate of Mercy-le-Comte, which he made over to me, can bear witness for me if they will in this matter."

Poulain laughed loudly. "It is droll," he growled, "to hear an aristocrat asking his peasants for a witness in his favour. Well, there are some of them here; let them stand out presently and say a good word for their master."

And the National Representative smiled, drumming with his fingers on the table.

"The States-General is ancient history," he said. "It is a little late in the day to boast of having resigned rights which were never rights at all, simply remnants of barbarism. I suppose we shall next be told, *citoyen*, that you rejoiced at the fall of the Bastille? That would certainly be the test of a good patriot, as I believe the villanous old Launay was a friend of the desperately wicked old aristocrat, your father."

Lézard stared the prisoner full in the face, and had the satisfaction of seeing the quiet eyes flash, and a faint colour rise in the pale cheeks. In the gallery, listening breathlessly, Betty could hear young Louis grind his teeth and groan.

"The Mayor of Mercy remembers me on the day of rejoicings at the fall of the Bastille," said Bernard, very quietly. "I might call him as a witness in my favour. I will not deny, however, that my opinion as to that event has changed since then."

Durand wriggled in his chair and murmured something in the ear of the President.

"I understand, citizen: I understand perfectly: you have a good heart," said Lézard, with his mocking smile. "We have no room for sentiment here, however, and these proceedings are irregular. The prisoner cannot at least deny that he attempted to emigrate."

"I can indeed, sir," said the Vicomte. "I had no intention of emigrating. To begin with, I loved my country too well to think of deserting her. Besides,

though I naturally wished to place my family in safety, I did not wish to ruin them. I obeyed the laws of the Republic, which cannot have been originally intended for the destruction of innocent women and children. I did not try to save myself."

"We did not ask for your interpretation of the law," said Lézard, dryly. "Are we to understand, then, that the emigration of your whole family was planned without your knowledge? Silence: do not answer that question. We will hear the truth from others." He threw himself back in his chair and looked round the hall. "Are there none of Bernard Mercy's former servants who will prove themselves good citizens by bearing witness as to what he said and did on the night of the attempted emigration, in October, 1792?"

Betty, with a vivid remembrance of that night, stood and trembled. Louis moved an inch or two nearer to her; perhaps he remembered just then how he had threatened to set the dogs on his mother's friend. For a minute there was dead silence in the hall; then Poulain held a conversation in low growls with one of the jailers who came up to him, while Durand passed his hand over his face and looked more and more uncomfortable. Whatever spite he might have had against Bernard de Mercy in past days, it was evident that he did not join very willingly in trying him for his life.

"Citizen President," said Poulain, "there is a woman here among the prisoners who formerly belonged to Bernard Mercy's household. She would willingly deserve mercy from the tribunal by bearing testimony against him."

There was another moment of awful silence.

"Who can it be?" muttered Louis de Mercy, so low that only Betty heard him. She looked at him, and pointed down into the hall.

From behind the crowd two soldiers pushed their way, leading between them a little woman, trembling and pale. They brought her near the end of the table, into full view of both the judges and the prisoner. Bernard gave her one strange, sad glance, and then looked at her no more. It had seemed at first as if he might possibly escape, for he fancied that nothing but his aristocratic birth could really be proved as a crime against him. No one could really accuse him of having personally resisted the laws of the Republic; the Mayor, if he were not too cowardly, untruthful, and spiteful, might easily save him. But now that his judges were going to degrade themselves by letting this wretched little woman swear away his life in exchange for her own, he saw that there was to be no justice, and therefore all hope died within him.

"Your name, witness?" said the President.

"Célestine Bonne, widow," answered a trembling voice.

Lézard laughed. "A heavenly name!" he said. "And yet you wish to send your late master to heaven before you? Well, you are wise, if not amiable. Come, do your best, but remember that the tribunal is not easily satisfied, and you may find your head in danger after all. We shall pay you according to your work."

At that moment Madame Bonne looked as if she was

going to faint, or would willingly sink at once into the earth. But one of the guards gave her a push and said, "Go on, *citoyenne*, there is no escaping now. The Representative can't eat his words; he will pardon you for an encouragement to others. This sort of thing makes his work easy for him."

Assisted by questions from Poulain and the President, Madame Bonne gave her account of the inner life at Mercy-le-Comte; of the talk she had heard, the plans that had been formed. She spoke of the old deprived Curé who had been received there, of the services that had been held there; she especially described the doings of that last night, the active preparations for departure in which the Vicomte had taken his full share, until he rode off to Mercy-le-Roy when it was supposed to be on fire, and left the party to start alone.

"Why was there all this sudden hurry of departure?" asked the President. "The letters to old Mercy, which were intercepted, spoke of no immediate start. Who brought the news which caused so much alarm?"

"Everybody knows that," said Madame Bonne.

"Then I am less wise than everybody," answered the President sharply. "Take care, witness. If I find you screening the guilty, there will be no mercy for you. Remember that you are yourself accused of living among aristocrats, of knowing their secrets and not revealing them. You also were of the party about to emigrate, according to the act of accusation that I have here. Who was the guilty person that warned these people of their danger?"

The wretched little woman stammered and shook. "The citizen Durand knows," she said. "The citizen Poulain, no doubt, has the act of accusation. . . ."

"Have the goodness to remember," said Lézard, savagely, "that I am the President of this tribunal. I am the Representative of sovereign authority; the voice of the National Convention is heard in me, and in me alone. These men who sit with me are my officials, and a prisoner who dares refer me to them insults the government of France in my person. Answer my question at once, as you value your life: how and by whom were this family warned of their danger?"

The pale, delicate-looking young man, white with fury and his eyes blazing, was even a more terrible object than Poulain with his angry red face. His soft voice too, suddenly raised, rang through the hall like a trumpet.

Poor Madame Bonne was almost too much frightened to speak, but after a moment she stammered out, "It was the English girl who lived at the citizen Durand's — Elizabeth Maynard."

"Ah! Certainly, I remember now," said the President, serenely. "There were a brother and sister who did immense mischief. The brother escaped with old Mercy; but the sister is fortunately in our hands. We will deal with her case next. Now let us return to our present business. I think, if the Public Prosecutor and the Mayor and the other judges agree with me, we need not waste much more time on this Mercy case. Nothing has been said about this Bernard's children:

however, if the parent stem is cut away, the young offshoots can be easily dealt with at another time. It is growing late, my friends. If we finish off the Englishwoman's case before supper, our work will be satisfactorily begun. We shall proceed with the trials to-morrow morning, after a night's rest virtuously earned, and the executions can begin towards midday. Now to finish off this first important case."

There was some deliberation among the judges: one or two other witnesses were called, who gave more or less worthless evidence against the Vicomte. No one dared to speak in his favour, though in that crowd there must have been some who would gladly have seen him set free. But for a revolutionary tribunal to acquit a *ci-devant* noble was an almost unheard-of thing.

Betty was so deeply interested in his fate that she hardly gave a thought to her own. Still, it was with strangely stony ears that she heard the sentence at last given forth — "Death." Death, without a dissenting voice among those men who had most of them known the old Comte's only son through all his blameless years; who could many of them remember the rejoicings at his birth, the feast held in this very hall and spreading to the courtyards and the square, so that not the poorest peasant was shut out from a share in the Comte's joy; and the repetition of all this on his marriage day, and the rejoicings at Mercy-le-Comte when his father gave up that estate to him whom the whole country knew as "the good Vicomte."

Well, it was all over now; and probably the person least shocked and struck by the verdict, though he had hardly expected it, was the Vicomte himself. He bowed to the tribunal; and when the President, himself even a little awed by the evident sensation in the hall, asked him if he had anything to say, he answered, "Nothing, except to ask the Court not to commit the great injustice of punishing the *citoyenne* Maynard for a pure act of unselfish kindness to her friends; and to ask of it also the favour of a parting interview with my three children."

Louis de Mercy had thrown himself down, choked with stifled sobs, on the floor of the gallery, and Betty, forgetting herself, was bending over him with words of encouragement, when she felt a heavy hand on her shoulder and looked up into Baptiste's dark face.

"Come," he said. "They are calling for you."

As he led her down the stairs she whispered "Escape, Baptiste. You will be the next. They will make that unhappy creature swear her soul away."

"No," he answered, "I cannot escape. I have some work to do. And listen: this very day I have sent a messenger to meet and hurry them. We may all be saved yet."

"God grant it!" said Betty.

Holding herself straight and proudly as any duchess, she walked into the hall, and took her place where the Vicomte de Mercy had been standing a few minutes before.

CHAPTER XXI.

BETTY'S TRIAL.

"My one friend, my only, all my own,
Who put his breast between the spears and me."

BETTY was glad to know that in that supreme moment she felt no fear. This was partly, perhaps, because her faculties were half deadened by the experiences of the day, through the whole length of which one new and awful excitement had so strangely succeeded another. In truth, standing there to be tried for her life, she suddenly lost consciousness of the place she was in, and fancied herself walking along the lime avenue at King's Cross which led to the church; the bells ringing a joyful peal as if at Christmas, or after a wedding; the Rector, with his round and benevolent face, coming slowly to meet her over the uneven flag-stones. She heard his voice say, "Welcome home, my dear!"

Then with a little start she came to herself, and was conscious of a muttering among the people near her. They said: "Old Bonne will have some stories to tell about the Englishwoman — she hates her. Ay, and here is little Mother Picot — good little revolutionist! That brigand tried to rob and murder her on the way

to Mercy-Citoyen that night, do you remember? She will have her word to say."

Betty looked round rather wonderingly. She did not feel angry, for all seemed to come as a matter of course. Nearer the table, guarded by soldiers, she saw the shrinking yet eager figure of Madame Bonne. Yes, there she was, still bent on earning her own safety. She saw little Mother Picot's face, too; thin, fierce, sunburnt, eyes round with terror like those of a captive bird of prey; her cap on one side, and grey wisps of hair sticking out wildly. Beside her, clutching her by the shoulder, so that such a valuable witness should not escape, stood the wife of Poulain, the leader among the female revolutionists of Mercy. From this woman's horrid face Betty instantly averted her eyes; but she looked again at little Mother Picot and smiled in spite of herself, remembering that night a year ago, and the struggle at the cross-roads. Perhaps, after all, she ought not to have tied the old woman's hands; but it seemed the best thing to do at the time, and she certainly had not thought that it might cost her her life.

Then she became aware that her name and age were being asked by the President.

"Elizabeth Maynard; nineteen," she replied in a clear voice; then a thought struck her, and she added with perfect coolness, "I am English: you have no authority over me."

Something in her manner impressed the men for a moment. Durand turned to the President and muttered

a few words in his ear, while Poulain on the other side growled audibly, "The Mayor will soon be *suspect* himself, if he speaks in favour of every criminal!"

It did not seem, however, that Lézard was at all influenced by anything Durand said.

"Their uncle? Who cares for their uncle! He should have kept them safe in England. Besides, you say he is dead. — You are mistaken, prisoner. You cannot with impunity break the laws of the country that shelters you."

"Monsieur, I have broken no laws."

"Silence! You are breaking them at this moment. — No, Citizen Poulain, throw away the act of accusation. These trials will never be ended, if we indulge each prisoner with a hundred formalities. The tribunal knows enough of this young woman's crimes already. There is our excellent Célestine Bonne, widow, who will explain to us again how she aided and abetted the Mercy family in their plot for emigrating. Another witness, a good republican this time, will tell us how she forcibly seized her donkey and cart, robbed and ill treated her and threatened her with death, on her way through the forest. It seems to me there never was a prisoner less likely to escape from justice. What is that?"

A young National Guard in full uniform, pushing his way through the crowd and the guards, advanced suddenly to the foot of the table.

"Citizen President," he cried, so that every one in the crowded hall could hear, "I claim life and liberty

for this young Englishwoman. She is my promised wife."

A shout, at first half of rage and half of disappointment, burst from the people ; the crowd made a surging movement towards the table, and the guards could hardly keep it back ; there was confusion, a rattle of pikes and a noise of angry voices. In the midst some one cried from the gallery : "It is a lie, dog of a revolutionist ! She would never look at you ! "

Fortunately, in the clamour below, the speaker escaped unnoticed.

Betty's pale face flushed scarlet ; she bit her lips hard, and then suddenly covered her face with her hands, unable to bear the hundreds of staring eyes all round. If this was Camille's last idea for saving her life, she did not feel obliged to him. Had he then forgotten his own generous words of renunciation in the corridor that very morning ?

Meanwhile, he stood at the table bareheaded, his arms folded, his dark glowing eyes fixed upon the President, who seemed for a moment uncertain how to take the unexpected announcement. Somebody on the outskirts of the crowd shouted, "Long live Camille Durand, and we will all dance at his wedding ! " — then a roar of laughter echoed in the vaulted roof, as somebody else cried out, "But who will play the fiddle ? "

The President rose to his feet and ordered silence, but it was some minutes before the people could be quieted, even by threats of turning them all out and locking the doors. Those minutes were the most trying

that Betty had ever in her life passed through. When order was at last restored, Lézard turned with an angry brow to the Mayor and said, "Who is this young man?"

Durand's face was a picture of terror and rage as he answered, "Citizen President, he is my son."

"Does he speak the truth?"

"No. To the best of my belief he is telling a lie. Before that Englishwoman left my house, she gained an influence over him, but not for worlds would my wife and I have consented to such a marriage. The wretched boy is trying to save her, regardless of his own interests. I beg you, Citizen President, not to listen to a word he says."

Then another voice broke in.

"My son speaks the truth, Citizen President. He has confided in his mother, and I am ready to say that there is no harm in the English girl. We have proved ourselves good patriots. We ask you to set the girl free, and to commit her to our care."

"The woman is mad! I know nothing of all this — they have deceived me," exclaimed Durand, in great excitement. "Do not listen to any of them, Citizen President! I ask it as a favour — I demand it as a right."

The President shrugged his shoulders. "When husband and wife differ, what is one to say?" He turned to Poulain with a short laugh. "You know this family, Citizen Poulain: what is your opinion?"

Poulain grinned. This was a fine opportunity of

gratifying his jealous spite against Durand, and he was not likely to let it slip.

"One must be honest," he began, in a low growl — "even when speaking of old friends." He went on to say that as for Camille Durand, he was a foolish, light-headed fellow whom nobody respected, and who spent most of his time playing the fiddle. That long before the English girl had been publicly marked out as a friend of the aristocrats, he had been known in the town to have eyes for no one else. And he, Poulain, had heard say that the two young English were rich proprietors in their own country, therefore was it not possible that the citizen Durand and his wife might have encouraged such a fancy? To be sure they could hardly keep her out of prison, when she had so openly taken the wrong side; but could anybody deny that when in prison, under the citizen Durand's authority, she and the other prisoners, especially those of the Mercy family, had been treated with an indulgence absolutely unknown in other parts of France — an indulgence so barefaced that at last good patriots could bear it no longer.

"Yes, Citizen President," exclaimed the blacksmith, stretching out a great red paw, and pointing an enormous forefinger at his rival — "that man beside you would never have taken a single step of himself towards the punishment of all these traitors. Ah! he need not deny it — I know it well, and there are others who know it too. He and his wife — that woman who is now supporting her foolish son in the attempt to

save an enemy of our nation — that woman who goes to church, who regrets the deprived clergy — ah! it seems to me that people have been arrested on far slighter grounds of suspicion than I could bring against Jean Durand and his wife. For much smaller reasons people have been called reactionaries, royalists, traitors."

The President, leaning back in his chair with folded arms, listened to this harangue with a faint smile. At the end he made Poulain a grave and formal bow.

"The subject of your speech is too serious," he said, "to be entered on to-night. It affects the constitution of this tribunal, you will observe. You make grave accusations, and I must enquire into them further; but not now. It is plain, however, that no particular favour must be shown, and that in the case of this young woman justice must take its course. I will ask her one question, and the witnesses can then proceed. Prisoner, is it true that you are the promised wife of this Camille Durand?"

Betty lifted her head and answered, "Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since last Christmas."

"Last Christmas! Indeed! That does look like over-indulgence, if the National Guards found opportunity to ask the prisoners to marry them. However, the date was only a matter of curiosity, which may become interesting later, when we have the honour of examining those who were in authority. Célestine Bonne, tell us what you know of the prisoner's doings on the night of the attempted emigration."

The crowd had fallen again into a somewhat awed silence. Poulain's language about Durand had produced a strange effect on those who knew both men familiarly, and had all their lives respected the Mayor, even more than the Comte de Mercy, as the first man in the town. He had always been the people's friend, their greatest employer, and of late years they had looked up to him as their leader. All the success of the Revolution in that district was owing to him, and a comparison with a blood-thirsty demagogue like Poulain could not but be favourable to him in every mind which still possessed a rag of moderation or decency. Madame Durand, too, was respected, if not liked, and Camille had always been popular.

Now the Mayor sat as if crushed, staring on the table, without an attempt to answer the terrible words of his enemy: the President indeed gave him no time to do so. Madame Durand stood close to her son at the end of the table, and pulled eagerly at his sleeve.

"You hear, Camille! It is of no use; we can do no more. Come away with me."

But the young man shook off her hand and stepped forward a pace, boldly stationing himself between the judges and the prisoner.

"All that the blacksmith has said against my father and mother is false," he said, "and every one in this hall knows it. They are far better patriots than himself, whose only motive is envy of my father."

There was a cheer, instantly stifled, but it made Poulain and the President frown.

"He was ignorant of the only truth he could have told to hurt us," the young man went on. "He called me a foolish fellow, and nothing but a fiddler. He would not give me credit for sense enough to be an active enemy of the nation. Citizen President, I denounce myself as a traitor to the Republic. It was by means of me that the Mercy family received the news which hurried on their escape. It was not my fault that they did not escape altogether. I kept back one from a packet of letters which were intercepted — my father will remember. He did not know that I had opened the packet. I gave that letter to the *citoyenne* Maynard. It was in consequence of this action of mine that her brother warned the old citizen Mercy and escaped with him, while she ventured her life to warn the other family. The whole thing was my doing. I was the traitor, I was the dangerous person, who put the whole matter into the heads of two innocent children. If you punish one of them, and not me, there is no justice left in France."

"Miserable!" muttered Jean Durand between his teeth, rocking himself to and fro as he stooped over the table.

His wife screamed, "Silence, Camille, silence! What are you saying, wretched boy!" and then was suddenly seized by two gendarmes, at a sign from the President, and led out of the hall.

For a few moments there was a great confusion. The only two in the hall who remained perfectly still were Betty, the prisoner, and Camille, the self-accused. As

soon as something like order was restored, he said quietly, "Citizen President, I demand a trial without delay. I tell you, you are wasting time, and travelling on a wrong track."

"So it seems, young man, if what you say is true," said Lézard. "But I warn you that if these judges find you guilty, this night is likely to be your last on earth. And you have brought your death on yourself, remember."

Camille bowed. In the shadow perhaps he smiled. But then he drew himself very upright, folded his arms, and stood prepared to answer for himself.

"Remove the English prisoner; her trial will be resumed another time," said the President.

As Betty turned round she suddenly fell, and for the first time in her life fainted away on the cold marble floor. She knew then that her life was probably saved by this delay, and that Camille Durand had saved it at the risk of his own. She tried to speak, to defend him, but the shock was too great after such a day of exhausting experience, and two of the jailers carried her unconscious from the hall. They were also going to remove Madame Bonne, but she resisted them and cried out — "Citizen President, I am free, am I not? I have done my duty!"

"But no, Célestine Bonne, indeed you are not free," replied the President. "What have you done, except bear witness in one case which was forced upon you? That is not enough to earn your pardon. You must make yourself of real use first."

A few rough remedies, a dash of cold water, soon brought Betty to herself, and she slept that night in a corner of the half-empty saloon — for a good many of the prisoners had been removed to other rooms — with Victoire and Marie on each side of her. The two young girls soon sobbed themselves to sleep; but Betty, though weary to death in brain and heart and every limb, only slept at intervals, constantly waking to hear the wild gusts of autumn wind that howled round the castle walls, roared in the chimneys, and whistled in the windows. Once, to her astonishment, a very different sound mingled with the crying of the wind — the church bells, chiming for a funeral. Betty could not and did not believe her ears. She knew that chime well, and by degrees had come to think its mournful cadence even more pathetic than the solemn tolling of one English bell. But she was perfectly convinced — though astonished at herself, a person so little given to fancies — that the bells of Mercy-le-Roy, so long silenced by the Revolution, could not be really chiming at midnight for any one's funeral.

"I am indeed changed," Betty thought to herself. "I ought to be going to die. First, I imagine myself at home, at King's Cross, and then I hear these bells chiming for dear Madame de Mercy, just as they naturally would, I suppose — only it would be as much as any one's life was worth to ring them now. There must be something very strange the matter with me."

Then she thought of Camille and prayed, perhaps more earnestly than she had ever prayed before, that

the Vendéans, if they really were coming, might come in time to save that brave young life. Then she fell at last into a dreamless sleep, so deep, so sound, that in the morning the two young girls were taken from her arms, and led away to their last meeting with their father, without awaking her.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONSTANTINE TO THE RESCUE.

"Il ne faut s'étonner de rien,
Il n'est qu'un pas du mal au bien."

The sun was high in the sky when Betty woke; and it was not the lamentations of those condemned to death, or the savage cries of the mob, or the clatter of military music, which roused her from that deep sleep, but a golden sun-ray falling straight upon her face through the top panes of the nearest window. At first — the land from which she came back was so far away — she did not know where she was; for a moment she fancied that she had waked in another world, that this gold radiance was the light of heaven. Then, with a sudden pang of returning mental agony, she remembered all.

She raised herself on her elbow and looked round the room. It was nearly empty; the only prisoners left were those six poor nuns who had been brought in not long before, and they were kneeling all together in a distant corner, praying just above their breath. The soft murmur of their voices came to Betty soothingly.

She wondered very much where all the rest were

gone. She guessed that Victoire and Marie were being allowed to take leave of their father, though it seemed strange that they should have gone away without waking her. She began to think that she must have slept many hours too long, that the trials must be far advanced, that her own turn must surely come again very soon; and the brave Betty lost heart for a moment as she thought, "The Vendéans are not coming; or if they do, it will be too late, they will find us all dead."

In getting up she moved her hard little pillow, and something rustled under it. She pulled out a crumpled piece of paper on which some words were written, and sat shivering on the edge of the bed, her brown hair tumbling about her shoulders, to read her French lover's last farewell.

"Betty, forgive me. I tried to do too much, to save my own life as well as yours, and only succeeded in bringing annoyance on you. But all will yet be well, and then you will feel that such a little thing did not matter. Live happy, and do not quite forget your devoted friend CAMILLE."

"He is going to die," Betty said to herself. "Oh, how can heaven look down on such injustice, such cruelty!"

She dressed herself hastily, hiding Camille's letter with the precious miniature inside her dress. "If I am condemned and searched," she thought, "the letter will hurt no one; and as for the miniature, I must give it to one of the children. Surely they cannot harm innocent children like those!"

The wind rose again and howled in long gusts; the trees in the garden rustled and groaned. Every now and then, in a sudden lull, Betty could hear the distant rattle and thunder of drums; but in the saloon all was still, and the seven poor women who were left there seemed to be forgotten. Betty became wild with restless longing for some end to this suspense; she was very hungry too, for she had gone to bed without supper. She began to walk up and down the room; never before, in all her long imprisonment, had she found it so hard to be patient. With Madame de Mercy her occupation was gone. Thinking of her, Betty could hardly believe that she had only died yesterday: years of pain seemed to have gone by since then. And now the two girls, to whom she had been ready to transfer all her love and care, were gone too. Why did they not come back? It seemed impossible that even the savage Poulain, the horrible Lézard, could bear any malice against such innocent children; but yet the Revolution began to seem to Betty like a wild beast devouring every living creature that came in its way.

As she paced up and down the six nuns rose from their knees, and one of them, after looking at Betty for a minute, glided across the room and joined her. She was an old woman, with a kind, good, ugly face, who spent her time in doing acts of charity among the prisoners, but she had never yet spoken to the English girl, whose attendance on Madame de Mercy had lately separated her from the others.

"You slept well, my child," she said.

"Yes, madame, too well," Betty answered, sadly.

"Do not speak so of the good God's greatest blessing," murmured the nun. "And call me 'mother,' not 'madame'; thus you will please me and keep the law."

Betty thought the law did not much matter now, but she could not help smiling. A year or two before, she might have repulsed this good woman's kindness with a roughness of manner that was quite gone now. To-day, tired, hungry, impatient, miserable, she sat down beside Mother Alix de St. Pierre and told her all her story, all her trouble. She even showed her Camille's letter, with tears which fell on it and blurred the already indistinct characters.

"Ah, yes, yes! Poor young man!" said the nun. "He has passed through a furnace, indeed; but it will comfort you to know, my child, that his death, which is certain, I fear, is not entirely owing to his self-sacrifice for you. This morning they brought him before the tribunal again. After counsel taken in the night, the President had determined to arrest the Mayor on a charge of sympathy with aristocrats, of over-indulgence to the prisoners. Camille Durand's life was offered to him on condition that he would bear witness against his father. Truly it is hard to believe in such savage wickedness. He refused to save his life in any such way."

"I should think so!" Betty exclaimed. "But how did you hear this?"

"From a chattering jailer who was fond of Camille,

and ventured to say to us that he was sorry for his fate. He came this morning to fetch the Demoiselles de Mercy for their farewell interview with their father, and he marched out most of the other prisoners to await their turn for trial. I saw him stand for a moment beside your bed, and thrust something — that paper, of course — under your pillow. And he told us other most extraordinary news, with which it seems that the prison is ringing. Baptiste, the head jailer, was arrested this morning as a royalist. You do not look surprised?"

"I knew it, mother. He was planning an escape for us all."

"Alas, poor man! Let us hope and pray that you may not be called as a witness against him. But his trial is probably over now, for they are hurrying them on. The executions are to begin as early as possible. That monster of a Representative says he will eat no breakfast till a dozen heads have fallen."

"Ah! But Baptiste — how was it?"

"It was the doing of a woman. Remember, my child, we must not hate anybody. It seems to our eyes as if that woman was possessed with an evil spirit, and in that case the only thing we can do is to pray for her."

"I understand. He was denounced by Madame Bonne."

"Poor woman! Yes. Is it not strange that all sins and crimes may be traced to one beginning — an excessive, misdirected love of self! To save her own

pitiful earthly life, this woman has done her best to destroy three other lives — that of M. le Vicomte de Mercy, your own, and now that of this poor jailer. But tell me what you know of his story."

"Yes — but have they set her free?"

"The man said that she was to be set free to go where she liked, as soon as she had given her evidence against Baptiste. Ah! in the lull of the wind, do you hear that roll of drums? Let us pray, my sisters. I fear that the work of death is beginning, and we must remember that our turn will come soon."

Betty knelt down with those six good women and joined in their prayers for the dying; but even at that time, though she dared say nothing of it to them, hope rose again in her heart, and she listened with unnaturally sharpened ears to sounds in the distance which broke in now and then upon the steady roll and rattle of drums. What was that far-off trumpet-call? What were those wild shouts and cries that pierced even through the thickness of walls, and that seemed like the voice of a great crowd in the square, expressing not triumph, not savage joy, but angry excitement and terror?

But Betty fairly started to her feet with a little cry when there came a light sound of many feet running on the terrace, the forgotten, unguarded side of the château; and when some one, just outside the window, whistled musically the old English air of *Barbara Allen.*

To the astonishment of the nuns, who all turned

their heads to stare at her, Betty sprang to the window and answered by singing, very much out of tune, a few bars of *God save the King.*

"Betty! Are you there?" said a voice outside. "Are there many people with you? Stand back: we are going to break in."

The poor nuns all rose with a scream, and crowded together like a flock of frightened birds into a distant corner. Even the brave little Mother Alix was infected with the alarm of her sisters at this new development in the situation. They stared with amazement at the English girl, who stood with clasped hands and shining eyes, as if she was about to welcome an angel down from heaven.

With a tremendous crash the window fell in, glass, wooden shutters, iron bars and all; and over these ruins there sprang into the room a tall slight youth with a white scarf tied round his arm and a pistol in his hand, whose bright joyous eyes and triumphant air of victory might indeed have belonged to some celestial messenger sent to right the wrong, to save the innocent from death, and to set the prisoners free. After him thronged a group of dark-faced men armed with pikes, their faces full of a fierce yet grave enthusiasm; and as they marched after their leader into the ruined saloon with all its squalid misery, the home for so long of a number of guiltless prisoners, they suddenly gave a shout, "God and the King!" which made the windows and the broken mirrors rattle, and shook the very floor. With them entered also the

October wind, which howled and clattered round the room, and brought whirlwinds of dead leaves dancing in from the terrace. But it was like a breath of real liberty.

"Oh, Con! You are come at last!" Betty flew to meet her brother and threw both arms round his neck.

"Not my fault, Betty, that we were not here long ago. But where are all the others? Lucien said this room would be full of prisoners."

"Most of them have been taken away to wait somewhere else for their trial. But Con — hurry, hurry to the square. The murdering has begun already. Oh, if you fly, dear, you may be in time to save M. le Vicomte."

"The square is already in the hands of our men. If there is any one left to be saved, he is safe by this time. But we heard outside the town that several heads had fallen. I came round this way, because we thought the prisoners on this side might be in awful danger while our men were storming the front. Ha! who comes here?"

There was a clanking noise in the passage, the door was hastily unbarred, and three or four National Guards rushed in, dragging some prisoners with them. Among these were Victoire and Marie de Mercy, who flew screaming to Betty.

But Victoire stopped before she reached her to stare in amazement at Constantine, who made her a low bow.

"Do not be alarmed, mademoiselle," he said, politely. "The castle is by this time in the hands of the Vendéans, and you and your friends, I trust, are safe. Your grandfather, M. le Comte de Mercy, is waiting for you anxiously. — Now, my men, drive off those National Guards, and let us meet our friends in the hall. — Follow us, ladies; you will be protected."

Betty for one had no doubt of that, as she proudly followed the brave young soldier. All fear had vanished from her heart, to be replaced by peaceful thankfulness, mixed with a deep and wondering admiration for her boy Constantine. The change that one year had made in him, from a romantic child to a bold and decided young man, occupied her thoughts even while she and her fellow-prisoners were passing down the passage, along which the National Guards had just fled before the Vendéan troopers, who so largely outnumbered them.

As Constantine thought, the whole château was already in the hands of the royalists. The surprise had been most brilliant. Though somehow lost to history, it was much more like the early successes of the Vendéan army than any that took place in the summer or autumn, or especially in this disastrous march to Granville which ended in such utter ruin. The main body of the army was pursuing its straggling march along the high road from the Loire; but a troop of its best horse, and a regiment of peasant infantry which could be depended on, were detached a few miles from Mercy, and sent off to put a stop to the revolutionary doings

there and to provide for the safety of the Comte de Mercy's family — he, being unable to ride, remained with the main body — and to set all the prisoners free. This detachment was commanded by a gallant young Chevalier de Beaumont, and it included several of the Comte's old servants, who had gradually got away to join him across the Loire, as well as Constantine Maynard, who — known by all that faithful army as "notre petit Anglais" — had distinguished himself in every Vendéan fight since the brave but unfortunate force took the field in the spring.

At the old steward's suggestion, Constantine and a few men were sent round by the park to rescue and defend the prisoners on the east side of the château; while the Chevalier de Beaumont with his troop burst upon the western avenue like a fiery whirlwind, drove before them the few soldiers who were supposed to guard it, and the crowd assembled to stare at the executions, who ran like terrified sheep; and finally, by a fierce attack in which some lives were lost, made most of the republican soldiers lay down their arms, stormed the gates of the château which had been hastily shut, and by mere desperate courage and violence, not by force of numbers, had both château and town in their hands in the space of twenty minutes.

It was only afterwards, of course, that Betty knew all this; neither did she know that at the first cry of "The Vendéans — the Vendéans are coming" — the tribunal which was just then busy with a summary trial of half a dozen Curés, to be followed by that of

the citizen Durand, dissolved itself in a tremendous hurry; the prisoners, gazing at each other in incredulous amazement, were left to go where they would; the judges, the gendarmes, the National Guards, the idle lookers-on, all rushed out into the courtyards and the square.

M. Lézard ran straight to the stables, took the first horse he could find, slipped out by a back way, and was soon riding across country towards Angers, leaving his subordinates to take care of themselves. When somebody in authority at Angers expressed surprise at such a precipitate flight, and asked whether Mercy could not have been defended against a handful of peasants, Lézard replied that he did not know, but that the life of a National Representative was a precious and sacred thing which belonged to the nation and not to himself, and that he had no right to risk it like a common, vulgar soldier. As it was, he lived to assist Carrier in those doings at Nantes which may be read of in history, and was finally, in December, 1794, guillotined with him.

Poulain behaved better. He seized a heavy axe, made by himself, which he generally carried about with him, and rushed out of the château to meet the enemy. He found a sharp fight going on round the guillotine itself. A string of hastily tried prisoners, six or eight, had been waiting their turn to die; their cords had been cut, and they were running back, unarmed and bewildered, to rejoin their friends in the castle and help in the rescue. As Poulain, raging

with fury, pushed his way through a struggling crowd, a man with a pistol in his hand, bareheaded, his shirt splashed with blood, leaped down the steps of the scaffold and met him face to face.

"What, Baptiste! You are not dead?" shouted Poulain, swinging his axe in the air.

"No, monster! No, murderer! Saved by half a minute. But look out for yourself: you have already two lives to answer for. *Voilà pour M. le Vicomte! Voilà pour ce pauvre petit Camille Durand!* Ah, wretch, could all of your kind be punished so!"

There was a sharp report of the pistol that Baptiste had snatched from no one knew where — he did not know himself — perhaps from the belt of the executioner, whom he had knocked down just as he laid hold of him, having freed his hands by a tremendous effort, at the very moment when the Vendéans were storming into the square. At any rate, he always said that he had used his weapon justly; for Poulain lay dead at his feet, and that seemed to him a small revenge for the two blameless lives that had been taken.

The Vendéans tore the scaffold down, broke up the horrible machine, and made a great bonfire outside the castle gates, on which they threw a quantity of prison furniture and all the papers of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Poor Jean Durand, still Mayor of Mercy, though he found himself in the strange position of a rescued prisoner, lifted neither hand nor voice to check these violent rescuers in anything they chose

to do. He did not even ask for his son's remains: he left everything to his wife, who had stood wringing her hands all that morning by the scaffold. He slunk across the square to his own house, crept in, barred the gate, and shut himself up alone, a broken-hearted man. When the Chevalier de Beaumont called for the Mayor of the town, that he might make requisitions for his soldiers, Lucien the steward came forward to say that there were stores enough in the château, and that it was not necessary, unless M. le Chevalier insisted, to break in upon the sorrow of a poor man whose son had died gallantly with M. le Vicomte. M. de Beaumont assented at once, and thus the grief of Camille's parents, revolutionists as they were, was held sacred by the Vendéans.

The troop remained for some hours in possession of the little town and castle of Mercy-le-Roy; the soldiers needed rest and food after their long march, and the prisoners had to make what preparations they could before starting off in different directions. Some of them hardly knew where to go; some resolved at once to escape beyond the Loire or into Brittany, where there was still room for those who did not love the Revolution. Some, the poor nuns amongst them, flattered themselves that they would be able to hide in their own old neighbourhood "until this tyranny was overpast." For Betty Maynard and the young De Mercys all was arranged: they were to accompany the Vendéan army, under whose escort the old Comte was already travelling, to the coast, and there to be

put on board some of the English vessels which were known to be cruising about with the object of bringing aid to the royalists. It was a dangerous expedition, with something in it of a forlorn hope; but it was a hope, and the only one. Several more were added to their party: the faithful Baptiste was to join his old master; the old Curé of Mercy-le-Comte was to accompany him as his chaplain; Jacqueline was to wait on her own young ladies. To all this party of fugitives Betty and Constantine offered a welcome at King's Cross, if they ever succeeded in reaching that English shore which even now seemed farther off than the shore of heaven itself. *That* had been near enough to some of them; their feet had been nearly wetted in the cold waters that lay between.

The inhabitants of Mercy had been seized with terror when the Vendéans stormed the town, expecting that they would be ill-treated and their houses given over to pillage. Many of them now found out that they had become revolutionists more from circumstances than from conviction, and were ready to cry "Vive le Roi" with these strange soldiers in every sort of rough attempt at uniform, and even to wear white cockades to please them. But they need have had no fear. The peasant soldiers who had crowded from their farms and villages to fight for the King, under leaders as simple and patriarchal as themselves, were only ferocious when fighting; at other times they were as gentle and well-disciplined as they were fearless and loyal. A crowd gathered again in the square round

the smoking remnants of the bonfire, a crowd that gazed with not unfriendly eyes, as a whole, on the doings of the Vendéans. No one attempted to interfere with the solemn funeral service that was held early the next morning for those who had fallen on that day of victory.

The funeral chime echoed over the town and the fading woods, and was carried by the wind far over the country where religion had become a forbidden thing; and Bernard de Mercy was laid to sleep with his fathers; and in the midst of a great bare-headed company poor Camille Durand was carried to his grave in a green corner of the churchyard above the little river, whose low sweet song might still rejoice one whose heart had been in his music.

But by this time Betty and her friends, in the Comte's coach drawn by six horses, escorted by a strong guard of Vendéan troopers, among whom Louis de Mercy rode with Constantine, were far away from Mercy-le-Roy. M. de Beaumont had hurried them off in the middle of the night for the sake of safety, and all through the hours of dark and then of stormy dawn they plunged through the rough forest roads, till at last, when day had broken, they overtook the main army, which had lingered for them, and M. de Mercy was united to the orphan grandchildren whom the Revolution had spared to him. A gleam of joy passed over his grief-worn features when Betty gave him back his precious miniature.

"You have been a faithful guardian of all my jewels," he said to her.

A few days later, having parted company with the main body of the Vendéans, who pursued their somewhat unhappy and distracted march to Granville, the Count's coach and its escort rumbled into the little seaside town of Bec-sur-mer. The Revolution had not even yet any strong influence here, so that it was a safe refuge for a day or two, and two returned *émigrés*, who had met the army at Fougères, recommended it to M. de Mercy as a probable point from which to escape to Jersey or England. Many memories thronged on Betty with the sight of the high houses round the quiet square where she had confronted her first French crowd, and for the first time had seen the face of her fantastic, faithful lover, and heard the strains of his violin. Her thoughts were full of him when she descended with the rest in the yard of the White Horse Inn, and was met once more by kind Madame Pommery, fatter than ever, and by Adrienne, who now lived with her sister, and who came struggling between smiles and tears to meet the two English children again.

To Adrienne that night, in a corner of the old guest-chamber, when Victoire and Marie were asleep, Betty poured out her grief for poor Madame Durand, and found, rather to her surprise, that Adrienne knew the whole story of Camille's communications with Baptiste, and had even heard what passed at the trial, and how Camille had claimed Betty as his promised wife, and she had owned the claim.

As the kind soul knew so much, and was evidently

curious, Betty told her all, but begged that the story might not be repeated.

"I do not wish my brother to know, unless I can tell him myself some day," she said. "He might not understand."

"I will tell Baptiste to hold his tongue," said Adrienne. "But M. Louis knows too. He heard it all."

"M. Louis will say nothing," Betty answered, with a quiet confidence in the young Frenchman's discretion and honour.

Adrienne proceeded to say that she had something to ask Mademoiselle Betty, something that might sound presumptuous.

"By no means, my dear Adrienne," said Betty. "Do not I owe you the cloak, which has been my greatest comfort for a year? I shall be only too glad to do anything to serve you."

By the dim light of a rush candle Betty could just see that Adrienne's comfortable cheeks were blushing; but though by this time she was herself an excellent French scholar, she failed for some moments to follow the flood of confused words in which the good woman explained what she wanted. At last, to Betty's surprise and amusement, she began to understand that Adrienne wished to go with the party to England, and that the person whose fortunes she wished especially to follow was no less than the hero Baptiste. They had long had a fancy for each other, it appeared; even long ago, when Baptiste was the Comte's smart valet,

and Adrienne the busy housekeeper at the Maison Verte.

"But at times he was too frivolous for me," said Adrienne. "I did not like his playing tricks and pretending to be wicked, for the sake of being made head jailer at the château. No; my poor old master was not worth much, perhaps, but I did not like his being deceived."

"But Adrienne," said Betty, "Baptiste was the greatest comfort to those who really knew him. To Madame la Vicomtesse, and M. le Vicomte, and myself — he was the only hope we had. Think of his motive and the great risk he ran, before you are angry with him. We have a proverb in England — 'All stratagems are lawful in love and war.' Well, Baptiste loved his friends, and he was at war with the Revolution."

"Oh, I do not say he is altogether bad, mademoiselle," said Adrienne, shaking her head and smiling. "But I do not like doing evil that good may come. However, if he was any comfort to the poor Vicomtesse, I will try to forgive him. But then again, he is the rashest madman that ever lived. Think of his stealing out to the churchyard on that last night, he and M. le Curé, so much too old for such adventures — and carrying Madame de Mercy themselves to the grave that she might have Christian burial; and not contented with that, going into the church at midnight and chiming the bells in honour of her funeral!"

Betty lifted her eyes, suddenly swimming with tears.

"Did Baptiste do that? I never knew! I heard the bells, but I thought I was dreaming."

"Baptiste knew better than to boast of anything so ridiculous," said Adrienne, wiping her eyes too. "Well, mademoiselle, here is the long and the short of it. He says he cannot go to England without me, and that if I can get your permission — he has already got M. le Comte's, and I have got my sister Pommery's — M. le Curé will marry us to-morrow morning. Mademoiselle may think that she has enough poor French fugitives on her hands already. I can only say that she will not find me an idle or useless person. We are both strong and healthy enough to make our way in the world, Baptiste and I; and when one thinks how near he was to having his head chopped off by those wretches, it is difficult to refuse him anything."

"My dear Adrienne, I will answer for Constantine and myself. He, you know, loves M. de Mercy as if he were his son. Victoire and Marie are my sisters; their dear mother gave them to me. Their friends are our friends. But you, Adrienne — you were my own first friend in France. You — you and Camille — were the first who welcomed the two little English strangers and tried to make them feel at home. I should like you to stay with me all the rest of my life — or at least till France is once more fit for honest people to live in."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," said Adrienne, simply; and Betty put both her arms round her neck and kissed the kind brown face.

Then Adrienne got up and stumped softly to the door, which had been pushed ajar by somebody.

"Come here, Baptiste, and kiss mademoiselle's hand. She says I may marry you to-morrow morning and go with you to England."

"And let us hope that the sea will be smoother than it is to-night, my poor Puss," replied Baptiste, appearing in the doorway.

Betty slept that night with the sound of waves in her ears, waves of the sea that still parted her from England and home; but nevertheless the years in France had already begun to seem like the dream of a long and dark night, from which she and Con were to wake and find themselves children at King's Cross again. They would indeed return to King's Cross, but never more as children.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WHITE PARLOUR.

"We hear faint far-off voices call us home."

Time, a November afternoon in the year 1800. Place, the white panelled parlour in the old Manor-house at King's Cross, where eleven years before Julius Maynard and his unwilling tool, now become an honest man of business, had plotted the exile of two children and the robbery of their heritage.

Elizabeth Maynard, a tall and rather stately young woman of six-and-twenty, sat alone in the twilight, knitting stockings from a pattern that Madame Durand had given her long ago. Her thoughts, as it often happened, were over the water; for those four years of life in France, during which she and Constantine had ceased to be children, and out of which their escape had been so narrow and so strange, were of a nature to cast shadows over many of the years that followed. Even now, after seven years of safe and happy life at home, the brother and sister had not done talking over all that happened to each of them in that time of separation, after Constantine and the Comte had been guided into La Vendée by the worthy Gascon Remy,

who had afterwards disappeared into his native South, and after Betty had been thrown into the prison from which she hardly expected ever to come out alive.

Of course the presence of their French emigrant friends at King's Cross did much to keep all this in their minds. More fortunate than many of his fellow-countrymen, the old Comte de Mercy with his grand-daughters found a home at King's Cross Manor, where he was treated by Betty and Constantine as if they too belonged to him. His old friend the Abbé Gérard had a lodging in the town, and dined every day either at the Manor or the Rectory; for Mr. Lisle was not a man of prejudices, and would never be left behind in befriending the friendless. Louis de Mercy, to his credit, could not resign himself to live on the charity of foreigners, though Constantine, who admired him immensely, begged him to consider his house his own. He went to London and found a situation as secretary to a man of business who valued a thorough knowledge of French. It was a more honourable and satisfactory way of gaining his living than many of his fellow *émigrés* could boast of — such as that gentleman, a Marquis of long descent, who made salads for London dinner-parties, and earned enough to drive about from one house to another in his own carriage and pair — but the young Angevin noble was of different and prouder stuff; he had not the light-hearted gaiety of nature which, happily for most of the *émigrés*, made it easy for them to suit themselves to their circumstances. Louis never complained, but year after year he grew

graver and more silent, and he was the only member of the family of whom Betty thought sorrowfully, his handsome, melancholy face, in his rare visits to King's Cross, reminding her strongly and painfully of his mother.

By the earnest advice of Mr. Lisle, Constantine went to College, but he had a good deal lost his love of study during that wild and adventurous year with the Vendéan army. He went through his course without much distinction, and came home gladly to throw himself into the life of a country squire. From that time there was no more ardent sportsman in the county, no more daring rider, than young Maynard of King's Cross. When Mr. Lisle asked rather wistfully what had become of the poems that were to be written, Constantine answered, laughing, "I think, sir, they must wait till I have the gout and am tied to my chair."

Very soon after the young squire left Oxford, the Comte de Mercy died; and his friend, the good old Curé, did not linger long after him. There was then some question whether Victoire and Marie should join their brother in London; but this idea was most unwelcome to Betty, who had grown to love the two girls most fondly for their own sake, as well as for their mother's. It was therefore arranged that they should live, rent free, in an ornamental cottage in King's Cross street which belonged to the Manor. Here Baptiste and Adrienne Mingot were also established; he as cook, gardener, butler, and man-of-all-work to the Demoiselles de Mercy, while at the same time he had a little shop

down the street and acted as barber to the whole community; she as lady's maid and work-woman and everything else in the house that he was not, and beyond this, earning her portion by fine needlework and clear-starching for half the ladies in the neighbourhood. As for Jacqueline, her black eyes and sharp speeches in pretty broken English had fascinated Mr. Oliver the churchwarden, a respectable widower, and though many people were scandalized at his marrying a Frenchwoman and a papist, so far as to say that he ought to be churchwarden no longer, Mr. Lisle silenced these tongues by the remark that if ever woman had gone through enough to deserve a good husband and a secure home, it was the present Mrs. Oliver.

During those years, very little news from Anjou reached the De Mercy family in their English refuge. When the Terror was really over, and France was beginning to breathe again, they heard by a letter from one of Baptiste's friends that no more horrors had taken place at Mercy-le-Roy. It had of course passed back at once into Republican hands, but there had not again been any assemblage of prisoners or any executions there. After a little time, Poulain being dead and his wife having left the town, Jean Durand, always Mayor, had quietly resumed his place at the head of local affairs. When the two châteaux with their lands were sold as national property, he had bought them both for very little money, thus gaining the old object of his ambition and becoming the largest proprietor in that part of the country. His vineyards were the

finest in Anjou; trade of all sorts prospered with him as it did with few people in those unfortunate years. It seemed as if he had been well consoled for the loss of his only son.

And now Elizabeth Maynard, as she sat knitting in the twilight, found her thoughts much occupied with a piece of news that Victoire and Marie de Mercy had told her that very morning, when she paid them a visit in their cottage; the news that Jean Durand was dead. Their brother Louis had told them this in a letter, adding that he hoped to come down from London the next day, if possible, to talk things over with them. It was a very short letter; he explained nothing, and did not even say how the news had reached him. Victoire and Marie were a little excited, however, and seemed disappointed when Betty said in her quiet way that she did not see how this news could make any difference to them. But she was herself a little puzzled, for Louis' visits had of late been fewer and farther between. It did almost seem as if there must be a special reason for this one.

Presently, as she sat and wondered, there came a cheerful tramping in the hall: she laid aside her knitting, and went to open the door to Constantine.

He had just come in from hunting, and looked a very handsome fellow in his red coat, though splashed from head to foot with November mud. His face was flushed; he pushed back the dark curls from his brow, looked hard at Betty for a moment, and then kissed her affectionately.

"Have you had a good run? Come in and rest yourself by the fire; you look tired," said Betty.

"Yes, the run was first-rate. Tired? of course not. As to that, Betty, you look queer yourself. Have you heard any news?"

"Why, yes. Nothing that matters very much to us perhaps."

"You mean about poor old Durand? My boots and your carpet won't agree, Betty," he said, following her into the parlour.

"Never mind. Sit down there," she said, and she poked the fire into a merry blaze and flung on a fresh dry log, which sent the sparks flying up the chimney.

"Why, it's a hot day," said Constantine, "and you treat me like an ox to be roasted;" but he threw himself into an armchair, and followed her with his eyes as she went to fetch her knitting.

"Never mind your needlework," he said. "How did you hear that news?"

She told him. "And you?"

"Well, that's a long story — or rather, a long story hangs upon it. I was riding home along the London road a couple of hours ago, when Louis de Mercy overtook me on his way here. And we have been talking ever since."

"On the road?"

Betty laid her knitting aside and sat down near her brother. The blazing fire lit up her steadfast face, her softly parted hair. Her eyes were slightly troubled, for Constantine's manner made her feel quite sure that

Victoire and Marie were right, after all, and that this news was more important than at first seemed possible.

"Not all the time, for we were within a couple of miles when he overtook me, and for a hired hack, his horse was a decent one. But he said at once that he must have a talk with me, and he wouldn't let me go to the Cottage, and he wouldn't come here, and he wouldn't go to the Crown. He is the very queerest fellow, Betty — however, you don't think so perhaps — but I must cut a straight furrow, if I can. As there was nothing else for it, I sent the horses to the stable, and he and I have been walking for the last hour up and down the churchyard."

"How tiresome! Well, but about this news?"

"Yes, to be sure. M. Durand's dead. Died as rich as a Jew. Pulled down half the château at Mercy-le-Comte and sold the materials, but kept the other in good repair, it seems. Here comes the strange part, Betty. Louis has had a most wonderful letter from poor Madame Durand, offering to sell him back all the family property for the same price her husband paid for it, which was something ridiculously small. She says there is not much difficulty now in getting one's name struck off the list of emigrants, and she advises him to see to it at once and return to the old country, where he will not find his name unwelcome. To convince him of her good intentions, she tells him that her husband's share in the revolutionary doings has weighed on her conscience for years, and that all this time she has provided for masses being said in secret

for the souls of his father and mother, as well as for that of her son. Well, the long and the short of it is that Louis thinks he must accept her offer, if he can raise the money — that he will easily do, for I shall lend it to him — and that he and his sisters must go back to France at once. You should have seen the fellow's eyes flash when he talked of going home."

"How extraordinary! Yet I always thought there was some good in Madame Durand," said Betty, in a low voice. "But oh, Con, what shall we do without Victoire and Marie! At least, he should leave them here till things are more settled. You must tell him that."

"I told him —" said Constantine. He leaned forward, smiling, and tapping his boots with his riding-whip. With all his gay, unconcerned youth — for he still looked like a boy — there was a certain doubt and anxiety in the eager eyes that were fixed on his sister. "I told him — I don't know how you will take it, Betty, my dear — but I told him that I could now hide my feelings no longer — in fact that — that — I could not part with Marie. I was obliged to put it in longer words than that, you know. I formally asked his consent to pay my addresses to his sister, Mademoiselle Marie. Louis is a terribly stiff gentleman. Neither his poor father nor his dear old grandfather ever put on such stately airs. He makes me feel quite shy, a regular country bumpkin. But what do you say, Betty?"

"I am very glad, my dear. And what did he say?"

"He said he had no personal objection, but should leave his sister to decide for herself. She can't say No, can she, Betty? She likes me, I'm certain, and I know I can make her happy. It would never do for a gentle little mouse like her to go back into that wild dismal country, though they all pretend to think it Paradise."

The young squire leaped out of his chair and took a few turns about the room, talking enthusiastically of the future. Then he stopped suddenly, his face became grave; he planted himself with his back to the fire and gazed at Betty, who still sat very quiet in her chair.

"But that was not all we talked about," he said. "It did not take me long to make him understand about that. He had something to say to me too, and I ought to have told you first, instead of going on chattering of my own affairs in this way. But you have spoilt me, Betty, do you know! You have been the best sister that ever man had, and more than that, there is not a better or nobler woman between the four seas. I ought not to be surprised that other people find that out too — but yet somehow I don't like it. I won't say that there is no man on earth worthy of you, but I will say that I don't yet know him. At least, I would rather you married in the old country, dearest. Many Frenchmen are very fine fellows — and I respect him with all my heart — but this is too much. However, perhaps you will say No."

"What do you mean, Con? What are you talking about?" said Betty.

She got up deliberately and took a screen from the chimney-piece; the fire burnt her face, it seemed.

"My dear sister, the Comte de Mercy does you the honour of wishing to marry you."

Constantine made her a bow and burst into a rather awkward laugh.

"I am very much obliged to him," said Betty, calmly.

"He tells me," her brother went on, "that he has never seen any one that he admires so much, and that he thinks you are aware of his great regard for you. All this time of course he could say nothing, and I am not sure that he would have said anything now, if I had not led up to the subject by talking of his sister. He will not be a bad match, you know, if he gets back his estates, and there is all the splendid plate and jewellery of the family, still safely buried, as far as we know, in the Louis Quatorze temple on the second terrace. From what I saw of those chests, they are a fortune in themselves. And I suppose things will work right by degrees in France, and as Comtesse de Mercy you would be safe even in war time, I imagine. But the important question is — do you like him?"

"Yes, I like him," said Betty. "And indeed I value his regard for me," she went on, in a very low voice — "but in confidence, Con, this is the work of gratitude, and nothing more. Or rather, it is that he cannot bear an obligation. He thinks that he owes us something, you and me. I know that always weighs upon him — I feel it whenever I see him — and thus with him a simple friendship has always been impossible. I am not

surprised at this. I shall ask you to tell him that I most deeply feel the compliment he pays me, but—"

Constantine drew a long breath, as if of relief; but he still kept his eyes fixed on Betty with a certain uneasiness.

"Louis said something amazingly queer," he murmured, after a pause. Then he flung himself into the armchair again and gazed steadily at the fire. "I was not sure about mentioning it to you, but after all, Betty, you and I ought to have no secrets, and I should like to hear the truth from yourself, my dear."

"What did he say?" Betty held up her screen more carefully than ever.

"It seems a shame to worry you by going back to such an old story. It was about that poor fellow Camille. He asked me if I thought you had quite recovered from his death. When I begged to know what he meant, he was dumbfounded by the discovery that I knew nothing. He said that if you had not told me, it was no business of his to do so. When I insisted, and said that I should at once ask you for an explanation, he told me that Camille tried to save your life in the Terror by claiming you as his promised wife, and that when you were asked if this was true, you answered 'Yes.' He said he did not believe Camille, but that he could not help believing you, and that it was not an instantaneous thing, but by your own confession had been going on for months. Betty, you told me that Camille denounced himself, and so stopped your trial and saved your life — but you never told me more."

"I will tell you all now, Con," said Betty.

The fire blazed in the old white parlour, and the twilight deepened outside in the garden; but the flame had died down, and evening had almost passed into night, before Betty's story was done. She was back again within the old thick castle walls of Mercy-le-Roy, and among all that surrounded her, there was no face so kind, no heart so true, as that of the young National Guard, the violin-player. This one friend, scorned at first, his devotion only accepted as a means of saving others, had been ready a dozen times over to lay down his life for her. If he had not actually done so, it was no fault of his. The memory of Camille — naturally perhaps — dwelt with Betty now free from all grotesqueness, from every small defect which might have marred the beauty of his faithful affection. His poor little letter was among her treasures; she had never shown it to any one, except to Mother Alix de St. Pierre on the day of rescue, till she fetched it and showed it to Constantine now.

"My dear Betty," said her brother at last, "you went through more in that year than you ever told me. But you would not have married him, would you?"

"No," said Betty. "Not willingly." She waited a minute, and then added, speaking low and fast — "But I shall never marry any one else."

Constantine laughed at this. After a time he left her, to change his muddy clothes, and then went to the Cottage for another interview with Louis de Mercy, and to enjoy the sight of Mademoiselle Marie's sweet

face. Betty knew that those four were happy, and had no fear that the young Comte de Mercy would die of disappointment at her polite refusal. The life of a quiet old maid in England, with such memories of her own, seemed better than any amount of titles and châteaux in the distance.

"After all," she thought, "one's own country is best, though there are such French people as Camille and my Vicomtesse. I will never again cross the Channel or revisit Mercy-le-Roy."

She sat down by the fire, on which a fresh log crackled pleasantly, and took up her knitting.

THE END.

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